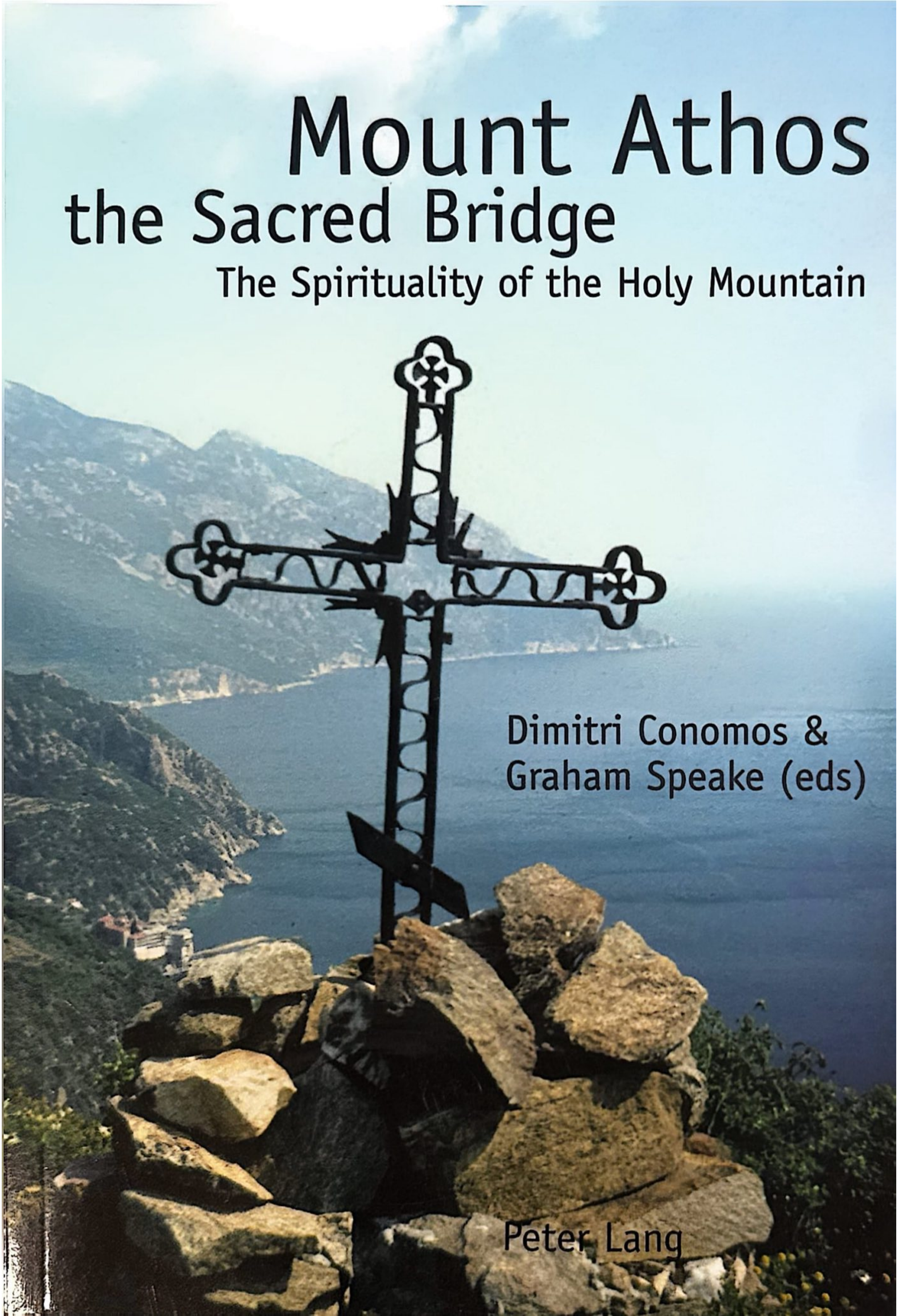

Mount Athos
the Sacred Bridge
The Spirituality of the Holy Mountain

Dimitri Conomos &
Graham Speake (eds)

Peter Lang

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Contents

Acknowledgements 9

DIMITRI CONOMOS AND GRAHAM SPEAKE
Introduction 11

NIKOLAOS HATZINIKOLAOU
Distinctive Features of Athonite Spirituality 17

ANDREW LOUTH
St Gregory Palamas and the Holy Mountain 49

KALLISTOS WARE
St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia* 69

SISTER MAGDALEN
St Silouan, a Modern Athonite Saint 123

NICHOLAS SAKHAROV
St Silouan the Athonite and Archimandrite Sophrony 141

ARCHIMANDRITE EPHRAIM
Elder Joseph the Hesychast: A Universal Image of Holiness 163

ARCHIMANDRITE ELISAIOS
The Spiritual Tradition of Simonopetra 181

ALEXANDER GOLITZIN
Topos Theou: The Monastic Elder as Theologian and as Theology. An Appreciation of Archimandrite Aimilianos 201

Notes on Contributors 243

Index 247

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Dimitri Conomos
Graham Speake

DIMITRI CONOMOS AND GRAHAM SPEAKE

Introduction

By means of a crowd I built a great mountain
– a tower reaching up to heaven.
Ephrem the Syrian

The knowledge of God is a mountain steep indeed,
and difficult to climb.
Gregory of Nyssa

Between 28 February and 2 March 2003 the Friends of Mount Athos in association with the Institute of Orthodox Christian Studies at Cambridge University held an international conference on the subject, 'Mount Athos, The Sacred Bridge: The Spirituality of the Holy Mountain'. The venue was Madingley Hall near Cambridge. Around a hundred delegates listened to six highly stimulating papers presented by speakers from the Holy Mountain, from Greece, from the USA, and from Great Britain. The objectives of the conference were to draw the attention of the wider world to the Holy Mountain's historic importance, spirituality, and religious legacy, to communicate scholarly views, and to shed light on the contribution made by Athonite monasticism not only to worldwide Orthodoxy but also to Christianity at large.

The present volume, which bears the same title as the conference, comprises eight essays: the aforementioned six presentations of the invited speakers (Archimandrite Ephraim of Vatopedi, Fr Alexander Golitzin, Bishop Nikolaos [Hatzinikolaou] of Mesogaia and Lavrion, Professor Andrew Louth, Fr Nicholas Sakharov, Bishop Kallistos [Ware] of Diokleia) together with two other papers bearing directly on the theme, originally given by guest speakers at Annual General Meetings of the Friends in Oxford in 2001 and 2002 (Sister Magdalen and Archimandrite Elisaios of Simonopetra, respectively).

Each of the authors places full responsibility for the Mountain's unique spirituality squarely on the shoulders of the Athonite elders. Indeed, most of the titles indicate a specific name. These are men who constitute the embodiment of an extraordinary tradition that bridges one thousand years of charismatic leadership and whose origins look back a further six centuries. In the pages that follow we shall read how the elders have guided, judged, inspired, healed, and interceded for generations of God-seekers. They are the steely girders of the sacred bridge which, for the monks, spans many lifetimes and many struggles. In turn, the elders also pass on a precious patrimony, the fruit of years of experience and encounter, to their disciples, to those who themselves will progress from sonship to fatherhood.

But what of Athos itself? While traditions of spirituality may be noted in other monastic centres, both Western and Eastern, the most extensive development is clearly manifested on the Holy Mountain. And if a particular mode of ascetic living is more comprehensively cultivated in one environment than in another, we ought surely to ask ourselves why this is so. What is it about this forcing ground of human expectation that makes it so peculiarly congenial? What is it about this environment (both the natural and the sociological) that makes it so particularly receptive? A further question: to what extent, in the process of being received and assimilated, is the tradition altered or transformed? Is there in the end something specifically *Hagioritic* about the way in which it has come to be applied on the Athonite peninsula?

Undeniably, the spiritual legacy of Athos has been shaped by and continues to depend on the unique character of that remote peninsula's physical and human landscapes. In this context we may shift from our bridge metaphor to personification: 'Here every stone breathes prayers' (said Fr Nikon of Karoulia, referring to the Athonite terrain);[1] and to allegory: 'The monasteries of Athos are gathering places [... where] the abbot is an image of God; he represents Christ, and the rest of the monks form the communion of saints, both the living and the dead' (wrote Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra).[2]

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[1] Quoted by Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia, 'Wolves and Monks: Life on the Holy Mountain Today', *Sobornost*, 5:2 (1983), 68.

At the same time, the association of mountains with the sacred has a long history and is not peculiar to the Judaeo-Christian religious experience. Virtually every religious and spiritual tradition has identified holy mountains where a transmission of spiritual knowledge or a divine revelation took place.[3] These holy mountains were perceived to be more than mere geographical locations of spiritual grace, but also metaphors of the spiritual path. To be sure, the legacy of Athos stems directly from the theophanies on the hallowed heights of Sinai, Carmel, Tabor, and Olivet. Where it differs, however, is in its enduring relevance. Other sacred peaks that shone with divine manifestation did so for a specific purpose and for a restricted period, while Mount Athos has for over a millennium preserved praying communities – laboratories of selfless love in which the kingdom of God reveals itself on earth. They clamber to its laps and integrate fully with the physical topography.

From this perspective we go some way towards answering our questions about the uniquely Hagioritic qualities of Athonite spirituality. Bishop Kallistos explains how the message of the *Philokalia*, with its three master-themes, *nepsis*, hesychasm, and the Jesus Prayer, encourages the monks to practise continual inner prayer as an avenue to personal holiness ('St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*'). For Bishop Nikolaos ('Distinctive Features of Athonite Spirituality') the physical landscape 'has something different about it. Everything and everyone is adorned with an *extraordinary* otherness of *exceeding beauty*.'[4] In other words, the monks and the monasteries are inextricably held within an all-encompassing environment of sacred space. There, in the stillness (*hesychia*), their prayer forms the 'indispensable basis for genuine theology' (Andrew Louth, 'St Gregory Palamas and the Holy Mountain'). We learn, moreover, that Elder Joseph the Hesychast

[2] 'A Thousand Years are but a Day', *Le Messager Orthodoxe*, 95 (1984), 20.

[3] To the Chinese, for example, all mountains are sacred. They are never just pieces of rock, but always a source of spirituality, worshipped as the embodiment of mysterious power.

[4] Editors' italics. Cf. Pentecost Matins, Second Canon, Ode VII, Troparion 3.

(Archimandrite Ephraim, 'Elder Joseph the Hesychast: A Universal Image of Holiness') had great respect for the inanimate creation:

> After spring it's beautiful here – from Holy Pascha until Our Lady's Day in August. The beautiful rocks theologize like voiceless theologians, as does all of nature – each creature with its own voice or its silence [...] everything has its own voice, so that when the wind blows, their movement creates a harmonious musical doxology to God.

The world as sacrament is also a leitmotif in the spiritual teaching of Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra. Sacramental, too, is his perception of himself as spiritual father where the task is not to impose a standard recipe for Christian living but to create communities that are morally and spiritually inspired and where personalities can be moulded (Fr Alexander Golitzin, '*Topos Theou*: The Monastic Elder as Theologian, and as Theology').

The monks and nuns in his care do not merely coexist biologically; they are a communion of persons that take as their model the supreme reality, the Holy Trinity, whose name the Church ceaselessly extols. Here, the term 'spirituality' refers to the lived experience of such a life in both its outward social and inward personal dimensions. The community's repeated gathering around the elder and its continuous prayer for the world constitute the essential effort whereby a determined spirituality is given shape and sustenance (Archimandrite Elisaios, 'The Spiritual Tradition of Simonopetra').

Personal sanctity and community-building are, therefore, the two touchstones of Athonite spirituality. The landscape of Athos, like the human state, can be fierce or gentle; yet it has lured men of humility and faith to a deeper understanding of who they are. St Silouan of the Rossikon was such a man. He encouraged the cultivation of love for all persons and all creation and his advice is uncompromising (Sister Magdalen, 'St Silouan, a Modern Athonite Saint'; Fr Nicholas Sakharov, 'St Silouan the Athonite and Archimandrite Sophrony'): 'The Spirit of God teaches the soul to love every living thing so that she would have no harm come to even a green leaf on a tree, or trample underfoot a flower of the field.'

What of the future? The French have a proverb: 'Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose' – 'The more it changes, the more it is the same.' In short, nothing really alters. Least of all, the human condition. With regard to the bridging power of Athos's spirituality, the essays in this volume testify to that:

> In spite of the historical and social changes it has undergone, the Holy Mountain is today, as it always has been, truly the 'Garden of the Mother of God'. For you it is an open window, a window through which you too can witness what an angel, a type of Christ, once showed to the Apostle John the Theologian: the heavenly Jerusalem, the eschatological dwelling of God with men.[5]

* * * *

The Friends of Mount Athos, who convened the conference, are a diverse group of individuals and communities sharing a common interest in the well-being of the monasteries of Mount Athos. The society, which owes its origins to the correspondence columns of *The Times* newspaper, was formed in 1990 and fifteen years on has a growing membership of about 750. Its honorary members include HRH the Duke of Edinburgh and HRH the Prince of Wales. Its charitable objects are officially described as 'the advancement of education of the public in the study and knowledge of the history, culture, arts, architecture, natural history, and literature of the Orthodox monasteries of Mount Athos and the promotion of the religious and other charitable works of the Holy Community and monasteries of Mount Athos'. In addition to its wide-ranging programme of activities and publications, the society makes grants for the restoration or conservation of buildings or works of art or books of educational or religious significance on Mount Athos and it acts as a group of concerned friends and supporters of the Holy Mountain who will provide assistance wherever practicable, in consultation with the monastic authorities.

Since the society's inception its Chairman has been Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, widely regarded as the foremost exponent of Orthodoxy in the West. In 2001 His Grace, known in academic circles as Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, retired from a lifetime of teaching at the

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[5] Abbot Elisaios, below p. 199.

University of Oxford where he had been Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies and a Fellow of Pembroke College. To mark his retirement a Festschrift containing articles by his friends, colleagues, and former pupils was published with the title *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press), edited by John Behr, Andrew Louth, and Dimitri Conomos. Since all three editors, in addition to the honorand himself, were present at the conference, the proceedings were interrupted at a suitable moment in order for the surprise presentation to be made. No more appropriate occasion could have been found than a symposium dedicated to the spirituality of Mount Athos: the publisher's publicity describes Bishop Kallistos as 'a person who has found his monastic "desert" among the "dreaming spires" of academia, and his "cell" in the lecture room'.

For the first ten years of its existence the society was proud to name as its President the late Sir Steven Runciman (1903–2000). In recognition of his lifetime's contribution to Byzantine history Sir Steven was in 1997 awarded the Onassis Prize for Culture. In a typically philanthropic gesture he entrusted the proceeds of the prize to the Friends of Mount Athos to be spent on a major work of conservation on the Holy Mountain. After consultation with the Holy Community the project chosen was the refurbishment of the Protaton Tower in Karyes as a depository for its archives, a museum for the display of its treasures, and a reading room where scholars could consult its manuscripts. Within three years the work was complete and Sir Steven was invited to attend a ceremony of rededication of the building and to address the assembled company of monks, dignitaries, and pilgrims. Sir Steven, at the age of ninety-seven, accepted and fulfilled both invitations. This last pilgrimage, undertaken with great courage and determination, to celebrate the symbol of his life's work so magnificently restored, was indeed the culmination of his life and three months later he died. With admiration, affection, and gratitude we dedicate this book to his eternal memory.

NIKOLAOS HATZINIKOLAOU

Distinctive Features of Athonite Spirituality

The Holy Mountain is a unique place. Long before setting foot upon its slopes, one senses its distinctiveness. Whether gazing at it from afar, browsing through any one of its many recently published albums, hearing a miraculous story, or encountering a monastic figure, this place – upon reflection alone – evokes unique feelings in any soul that yearns for God, seeks the truth, and dares to make right judgements. One's memories of Mount Athos remain deeply engraved, for experience is certain to have an unforgettable impact.

Yet why this uniqueness? Is it the incomparable natural beauty? Unusual societal structure? Glorious history, with its innumerable, deeply rooted legends? Wealth of holy relics and heirlooms? Countless anecdotes of miracles and godly signs, often sounding more fanciful than factual?

The Holy Mountain radiates a special kind of charm, one that allows truth to emerge in an original, but invitingly familiar manner. There, all things – even passions, weaknesses, human imperfections, faults, and bad habits – are expressed in distinctive ways. The old becomes alive and as fresh as new; whatever is recent shows itself to be as mature as anything from the past. The authenticity of the Athonite tradition has a unique timeliness. Yet its present-day adaptations bear no relationship to the worldliness of modernity's perception, for time and mortal beings exist, not to influence and define the truth, but rather to underline human reality. It is not only the people, the monks, who are different from us. It is also the place itself that has something different about it. Everything and everyone is adorned with an 'extraordinary' otherness 'of exceeding beauty'.[1]

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[1] Pentecost Matins, Second Canon, Ode VII, Troparion 3.

On the Holy Mountain the grace of God is manifested in special ways, with respect to both its measure and quality. Every single pilgrim comprehends divine grace as a purely personal and original spiritual experience, which differs from the experience of others: 'each one hears in his own native language.'[2] Even when the manifestations of divine grace recur, they always seem to be novel and fresh.

This experience, branded on the heart and recorded in the conscience of the pilgrim, is clearly defined with respect to its effect – it is very powerful; yet it is undefined with respect to its more profound cause – it defies interpretation. Once the Holy Mountain has touched one's heart, it is no longer a place to be visited; it is instead transformed into a spiritual state to be experienced. The more you know it, the more its image becomes clear and its spirit familiar; at the same time, however, its mystery becomes more profound, more unknown, and intensely sacred.

It is the intention of this paper to reflect on the spiritual and charismatic uniqueness of the Holy Mountain and to make its concealed features more visible; to adorn the doxology of silence with words of appreciation, but without desecrating the mystery.

Aspects of Athonite Distinctiveness

The Church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the extension of Pentecost. Thus, spiritual life is the life of the Church; it is communicated inside a 'house',[3] in 'a large upper room furnished and ready',[4] within a specific environment and under particular conditions, the characteristics of which directly and decisively affect it.

Not an ordinary place, the Holy Mountain is characterized by certain morphological, external, and functional features that can be found nowhere else and have essentially contributed to its present spiritual identity.

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[2] Acts 2:8.

[3] '[...] and it filled all the house where they were sitting' (Acts 2:2).

[4] Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12.

A Monastic State Unique in the Entire World

The first characteristic of the Athonite state is that it is entirely monastic. In other words, its citizens are exclusively monks. Its population is devoted to God, alienated from married life with its joys and sorrows. Not only does family not constitute a secondary matter, but even the mere thought of it is unacceptable. All things – daily routine, diet, clothing, speech, and habits – are oriented towards a specific direction.

Monastic life remains entirely estranged from the basic and necessary elements that inform society's perception of life. Thus, it bears absolutely no relationship to notions such as employment, money, wages, achievement, recognition, promotion, earthly visions, one's own will, rights, succession, marriage, and time. Anything reduced to matter or incarcerated in the prison of ephemeral life is altogether alien to monastic reasoning and the monk's practical life. His life is based on what we call the 'renunciation of the world'[5] and 'voluntary hatred of material things'.[6] His main virtues are chastity, obedience, poverty, fasting, vigil, and prayer. The kingdom of God is a far more realistic target and its vision far more natural than the acquisition of a university degree, the pursuit of impressive investments, or professional success.

What possible relationship could this wisdom bear to love of the flesh, antagonism, human rights, excessive wealth, greed, indolence, and egotistical behaviour, all of which dominate today's society?

One can – and perhaps does – find many of these qualities in certain other monastic centres, but on the Holy Mountain the difference lies in the fact that these principles prevail as laws, not only in this or that house, but in every monastery on the peninsula of Athos.

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[5] Abba Isaac, *Ascetics*, 2nd Homily, 'On the Renunciation of the World' (Thessaloniki, 1977), p. 8.

[6] St John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 1, 'On the Renunciation of the World' (Boston, 1991), p. 4.

Away from the Holy Mountain one finds monasteries dwelling in the secular atmosphere of this world. Not surprisingly, they are often in the vicinity of cafeterias, hotels, tourist shops, etc. But on Mount Athos the monks' habitations are surrounded only by other monasteries, sketes, cells, and hermitages, which collectively comprise the Athonite monastic state. Emerging from a monastery on the Holy Mountain, you are not in the world, neither are you exposed to its dangers and temptations. Rather, you find yourself in the vicinity of other settlements with similar perspectives, standards, and values. By avoiding the risk of making unpleasant comparisons, it is at once possible to detect deep within oneself the challenge and determination of common struggle and monastic direction. Therefore, to leave the monastery for some justifiable reason may even strengthen and encourage one's ascetic effort.

The monks' neighbours are not pilgrims, much less the world, but rather their co-struggling brethren in the nearby monasteries. In this way, the monastic state is distinguished by its sense of completeness and self-containment. A few years ago, during a stay in a cell at Karyes, I met two monks, brothers in the flesh, who lived with simplicity and monastic constancy. Although they had come from Samothrace, an island that could easily be spotted from their cell, for the duration of their forty-year absence they never felt the desire to visit their homeland. The conditions of Athonite life, together with their uncompromising zeal, had transformed any temptation towards nostalgia into a mere remembrance of the past.

Historical Continuity

A second significant element that defines Athonite identity is the fact of the Holy Mountain's long, continuous history as a centre of monasticism. It is interesting that even today, during the litanies and long church services, the names of the Byzantine emperors and benefactors of the monasteries are commemorated with such ingenuousness that, while it may sound strange to pilgrims, the practice gives the monks a sense of their solid and deep ancestral roots and heritage.

Every aspect of Athos's rich tradition has been inscribed both in the *typikon* (or rubrics) of the services as well as in the entire life of the monks. Uncompromising dedication and a discreet austerity are more indicative of consistency in higher spiritual planes than predilection towards strict attitudes and narrow-minded prejudice.

Coherent and unwavering liturgical traditions that have long withstood the test of time can be also found in other monastic foundations. Nonetheless, the Athonite tradition is marked by widespread, multidimensional, and time-resistant permeation in all segments of Orthodox spiritual life. Thus, the theology of St Gregory Palamas, the work of St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (especially in his edition of the *Philokalia*), the influence of St Paisy Velichkovsky in the spiritual initiation of the Slavs, the frescos of Panselinos and the school of Theophanes the Cretan, the architectural and artistic traditions in the churches, the music and chanting, and all other forms of Orthodox church art have been profoundly influenced by the spirit of the Holy Mountain.

Despite historical changes, periods of decline, and the threat of depopulation or degeneration, an invisible power has brought unexpected solutions, adding each time to the multitude of God's signs one more impressive, real, and new element of his presence and love. Just as apostolic succession forms the spinal cord of the sacrament of priesthood, the sense of historical continuity in the Athonite tradition constitutes the cornerstone of its spiritual course.

The Avaton *— A 'No-Go' Area for Women*

The *avaton* of the Holy Mountain constitutes the most extraordinary and exceptional characteristic of the Athonite state. Throughout its thousand-year history no woman has ever set her foot on this holy land.[7] Moreover, every female animal is also regarded as unwelcome on the Holy Mountain. While for the monks and for the friends of Mount Athos this feature is respected as highly profound and mysterious, it has become the most provocative of scandals for those who focus only on the peninsula's natural beauties and treasures, overlooking its sanctity. For them, the Holy Mountain is just a museum, a place one visits to satisfy one's curiosity.

There is no doubt that this prohibition safeguards Athonite life and spirituality, and while it occasionally becomes the target of heated controversy, it ultimately remains intact. Recently, on 14 January 2003, the Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Union, motivated by entirely secular considerations, called for the abolition of the *avaton.*[8]

The exclusion of women from entering the Holy Mountain can scarcely be described as an eccentric, secular proscription. Athos's terms and laws do not aim at setting prohibitions, but at protecting the right of monks to delight in the statutes of the Lord and not forget his word, to keep his testimonies, to learn his righteous ordinances.[9] Essentially, they exist to preserve the yeast of truth alive, the seed of healthy judgement intact, inner experience genuine. The Holy Mountain is not based on individual rights but operates according to the logic of God's rights.

The *avaton*, often regarded as a privilege of the Holy Mountain, is rightly considered also to be a very important and decisive factor in the preservation of its spiritual character. In no way does it suggest misogyny or a disrespectful debasement of the female gender. Its rationale is to underscore the monastic community's total concentration on what is absolutely necessary.

This is confirmed by the great esteem held for the person of the Theotokos as well as for other women saints, such as St Anne,

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[7] Actually, there have been a very small number of violations of Athos's *avaton* regulation. Those that occurred did so under circumstances so unusual that in essence they did not break the rule.

[8] European Parliament, Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs, *Report on the Human Rights Situation in the European Union*, Brussels, 12 December 2002.

[9] Psalm 119:16, 2, 7.

honoured by the largest skete, St Mary Magdalene, the protector of Simonopetra monastery, and the Righteous Anastasia of Rome, revered by the monastery of Grigoriou. Large segments of the saints' holy relics are preserved in their respective monasteries: the leg of St Anne, the left hand of St Mary Magdalene, and the right hand and legs of St Anastasia.[10]

Only what is purely spiritual, ascetic, monastic, and absolutely necessary is desirable. The presence of women is neither desirable nor, of course, necessary. This prudent balance between the desirable and what is necessary constitutes the greatest legacy of and defence for the Holy Mountain's spiritual life. What is unnecessary is superfluous and therefore rejected. For the monks, the principle of the *avaton* enables them to keep their minds cleansed from all earthly thoughts.

A few years ago, a well-known Athonite ascetic, Fr Paisios, told me the following remarkable story. A wise and holy abbot had been suffering from a serious health problem and was advised to go to Thessaloniki to be hospitalized. However, he strongly rejected this suggestion without saying why. Finally, the assembly of the fathers at the monastery decided, without consulting him, that he must obey. The abbot then opened his heart and with remarkable humility, purity, and chastity related the following to them. He had come to the Holy Mountain as a child. Since then he had never been back into the world and because he could not remember exactly how women looked he would not be able to protect himself in the face of temptation. The fathers told him that women are shorter than men, they do not have beards, their voices are weaker, and so forth. Then he said, 'Now I understand; they somewhat resemble St Barbara or St Paraskevi.' He would not have dared extend the comparison to the Mother of God. Ultimately, and with God's will, not only did he undergo surgery, but he also inspired with the aroma of his saintliness the entire hospital staff. In making the acquaintance of an ill monk they experienced the marvel of an earthly angel.

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[10] G. Smyrnakis, *The Holy Mountain* (in Greek) (Mount Athos, 1988), pp. 412, 596, 632.

In order for the Holy Mountain to be a bridge to God and his grace, it must, for every thirsty soul, draw its limits without negotiation and maintain its *avaton* without compromise.[11]

The Autonomous Status of the Holy Mountain

From its beginning and throughout its history, the Holy Mountain has functioned under a special, privileged status of autonomy. In effect, it forms an inseparable part of the Greek state, but its administration is 'exercised through the representatives of the monasteries that constitute the Holy Community'.[12]

According to the Athonite fathers, this circumstance alone justifies describing the Holy Mountain as a 'boast of all Orthodoxy, where servants of Christ of every nationality share the life of monastic virtue in wondrous brotherly unity'.[13] The Holy Mountain's privileged autonomy does not constitute a legal or civil advantage with purely secular rewards, but rather an integral part of the monasteries' spiritual life since, 'for the Athonite monks who have renounced the world, it constitutes a way of living and thinking'.[14] It is a conscientious conviction of the Athonite fathers that the Holy Mountain could not exist without this form of sovereignty which guarantees its pan-Orthodox character, recognized by the presence on Athos also of non-Greek monks.[15]

Of significance, too, is the fact that, in strictly ecclesiological terms, the Holy Mountain is not subject to a particular jurisdiction. Its imperial monasteries are in essence 'self-governed and self-ruling', even though, until the fourteenth century, they commemorated the name of the local bishop of Ierissos, without actually being dependent on him. Only since the fourteenth century has the name of the Ecumenical Patriarch been universally commemorated on Athos, lending even greater prestige to the monastic houses. The concept of sovereignty and autonomy within the Church, where everyone falls under a bishop's administrative authority, emphasizes the individuality of the Athonite monastic estate. It bears fruit only under conditions of prudent autonomy and true freedom. This subtle dimension of freedom emerging from the respect for the uniqueness of Athonite monasticism is reflected in return in every aspect of its life.

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[11] G. Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (New Haven and London, 2002), p. 266.

[12] Article 105, par. 2 of the Greek Constitution.

[13] *Sacred Decree of the Holy Mountain Athos and the Relevant Official Documents* (in Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1913), p. 7.

[14] *Decree of the Holy Community of the Holy Mountain Athos on the Hagiorite Status*, 3/16 March 1995.

[15] Archimandrite Georgios of Grigoriou, 'On the Autonomy of the Holy Mountain, its Greek Nationality and Panorthodox Character', in *The Status of the Holy Mountain Athos* (in Greek) (Mount Athos, 1996), pp. 133–52.

Diverse Coexistence

Although, at first glance, one senses a challenging sameness and monotony in the lifestyle of the Holy Mountain (identical clothing, absence of women, unchanging daily routine, abstinence in all things), there is, at the same time, an unquestionable diversity.

First, we see variety in the very form of monastic life itself. A monk may choose to live in a cenobitic monastery, sharing a common life under unreserved obedience, or in an idiorrhythmic skete following a more flexible regime, or in a cell that favours a more agricultural lifestyle, or in a hermitage or *kathisma* in order to dedicate himself to inner prayer and ascetic struggle.

Moreover, the ethnic origins and corresponding traditions and characteristics of the various (mainly Balkan) countries represented on the Mountain exhibit an admirable assortment. Thus, one will meet Russian monks at the monastery of St Panteleimon, Serbs at Chilandar, Bulgarians at Zographou, and Romanians at the sketes of St John the Forerunner and Lakkou. All maintain their language, their saints' feasts, their liturgical customs, and so forth. In spite of the fact that the Arab world has very rich Orthodox traditions, there exists no Arab-speaking monastery; however, together with the many American and European monks (themselves from varied backgrounds, ethnicities, and traditions), the Arab Orthodox, too, contribute to Mount Athos's extraordinary ecumenicity and universality.

It is very interesting that the Holy Mountain appeals to both non-Orthodox and non-faithful alike, and this in spite of its obvious conservatism in matters relating to ecumenism, the non-acceptance of women, and the commitment to everything being subject to the absolute and strict character of monasticism. Apparently, the Holy Mountain speaks spiritual languages understood by all well-meaning pilgrims, since 'each one hears in his own native language.'[16]

The coexistence of different traditions, *typika*, spiritual leanings, and customs has been a prevailing characteristic on Athos from earliest times. It lends to the Holy Mountain an enviable diversification which creates an inner peace and serenity emerging from the freedom inherent in the Orthodox ethos.

Mount Athos is the place *par excellence* where one can feel God's mercy and truth embracing every human being, irrespective of religion, nationality, cultural habits, or personality. There God demonstrates his freedom and reveals man's freedom. It expresses the universality of his love and abolishes the rigidity of human forms and perception. It brings forth the distinctiveness of languages[17] and the individuality of the tongues[18] of Pentecost.

The Environment and Daily Life

The same details that characterize in social and historical terms the course and basic features of life on the Holy Mountain, also define its age-old and contemporary image as well as the particulars of its daily routine. Even today, the Holy Mountain continues to be a different kind of world, where we can experience history and thereby cease from chasing time or specific events. We can function unhurriedly, behave fearlessly, and express ourselves spontaneously. Nature, the determination and counting of time, rubrics, priceless treasures –

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[16] Acts 2:6.

[17] 'And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance' (Acts 2:4).

[18] 'And they were amazed and wondered, saying [...] And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native languages' (Acts 2:7, 8).

everything bears a unique quality which even today can never be destroyed.[19]

As a setting Athos boasts a perfect combination of mountain and sea, blending relaxing serenity with friendly wilderness. The grandeur of a thick, untouched forest harmonizes with the barrenness of a precipitous, unscaled rock. These natural features serve as an inspiration for the monks to practise ascetic austerity, to experience the 'peace of God, which passes all understanding',[20] to dare to look for God on untrodden paths. Hence, on the Holy Mountain nature is not to be enjoyed in a worldly way, but is a revelation of the kingdom of God.

Athos counts its days by the old Julian calendar and determines its hours according to the Byzantine chronometer. Both systems are eminently suited to prayer and monastic humility. Everything moves more slowly, is unrushed; it is for this that the date discreetly lingers thirteen days behind the rest of the world. Even today, the reckoning of time on the Holy Mountain unrelentingly resists adaptation to secular time; the Athonite clock seems to be synchronized solely with eternity.

The day begins at sunset, not midnight, a beginning connected with a natural phenomenon, not one marked by man-made calculation. The disappearance of the sun defines time and not vice versa. Twilight finds the monk already alert, in a state of contrition, ready for the struggle of his daily vigil. A monk's life illumines the darkness of the night and rejuvenates it with the sighs of prayer, postponing all the necessities of survival, even rest itself, for the light of day.

The mandatory differentiation from secular lifestyles makes it easy to understand that the Athonite lives in a world where time is not conventional but eternal. He does not pursue events but merely observes them. All procedures are characterized by a certain independence and autonomy. Concepts such as impetuousness, impatience, and stress are unwarranted on the Holy Mountain and, consequently, meaningless. As the monks say, they know when the services begin, but not when they end.

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[19] N. Hatzinikolaou, *The Holy Mountain: The Highest Place on Earth* (in Greek) (Athens 2000), p. 142.

[20] Phil. 4:7.

Meals, which all monks share in common, are always meatless. The monk who cooks, together with those who prepare the table, always ask forgiveness for any possible oversights, and the recipient of this act of love is called to forgive the granter and servant. Monotonous spiritual readings in the refectory constitute the most ideal accompaniment to the 'consolation' of nutrition and biological subsistence that has been rendered.[21]

The manner in which monks greet each other is also original.[22] Conventional good wishes and worldly compliments are completely absent. Instead, you hear 'Bless!', 'The Lord bless you!', 'Let it be blessed!' If you wish to thank someone you say, 'May God forgive you', or if you want to enter a cell, you knock on the door saying, 'Through your prayers', and proceed only if you hear 'Amen'. Supplication, gratefulness, salutation – everything is expressed as forgiveness, as acceptance of God's will, as a prayer for salvation.

Moreover, Athos's long-standing, traditional hospitality, offered to all pilgrims (their number has increased in recent years), is characterized by unique features. Where else are so many people – strangers to each other and often arriving without prior notification – welcomed with such cordiality, enjoined to become part of the monastery's life and to share with the monks the church services, the food, and the stillness? Departing, they carry with them, in addition to the absolution after confession, the grace of a sacred pilgrimage, decisions for a new life, spiritual acquaintances, and monastic friendships.

Finally, the irresistible sacred services on the Holy Mountain sustain an ambience which perhaps cannot be found anywhere else in the world. The church is illumined solely by candles, small and large, which a monk is charged to light or extinguish at appropriate times. During great feasts, the swinging of the chandeliers, the offering of incense in the *katzi,*[23] the fully adorned katholikon, the steady chanting, the recitation of the canonarch,[24] the long duration of the services, the continuous moving about of authorized monks on duty, the commemoration of the imperial names such as Nikephoros Phokas and Tsimiskis – all are conducted simply and unaffectedly, yet with extraordinary dignity.

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[21] N. Hatzinikolaou, *The Holy Mountain: The Highest Place on Earth* (in Greek) (Athens 2000), p. 145.

[22] C. Moustakas, *The Holy Mountain* (in Greek) (Athens, 1957).

[23] A type of censer used in monasteries during church services.

To this day, the Holy Mountain's chanters are highly acclaimed. On a daily basis, they tirelessly praise God, inextricably interweaving their mellifluous voices: an expressive dynamic of ascetic experience. It is not the intention of their art to demonstrate personal talent, but to express itself as God's gift. Similarly, their chanting is not offered as ear-pleasing euphony but as prayer that entreats the ear of God.

Characteristics of Athonite Spirituality[25]

It goes without saying that, under conditions such as those described above, this monastic environment must give rise to a spirituality unique in its expression and character.[26] The presence of the Holy Spirit and of faithfulness in a monk's daily life, prayer, and personal experiences exhibits particular features found nowhere else with equal clarity.

The Presence of the Theotokos

The Holy Mountain is known as the 'Garden of the Mother of God', as the place *par excellence* where the person of the most holy Theotokos is honoured, makes herself visible, acts, and is pleased to dwell.

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[24] The execution of lines from the hymns in *recitativo secco* by a chosen monk in anticipation of their choral rendition by the right and left singers.

[25] The text that follows constitutes an extract from personal experiences recorded during my two-year stay at the monastery of St Paul on Mount Athos.

[26] St Philotheos Kokkinos writes, 'Holy Athos is truly the sole workshop of all virtues, admissibly the most special place in the world, the holy hut, the truly great and amazing storehouse of virtues' (*Against Grigoras* 12).

It is considered to be 'the noetic and beautiful paradise of the Theotokos'.[27] According to tradition, the Holy Mountain was given as a bequest to the Mother of God by the Lord himself: 'Let this place be your own legacy, garden, and paradise; let it also be a salvaging harbour for those wishing to be saved.'[28]

Just as the first Eve fell from the paradise of old, so the second Eve, being the mother of the second Adam, unfolds the grace of her names in the new paradise of the Holy Mountain. The Lady of the Angels appears now as the lady of the angelic order of monks. She who is full of grace manifests her grace through icons, pilgrimages, experiences, anticipated replies to requests, unanticipated answers, doxological outbursts, visitations to sanctified ascetics within the cell of their compunction, or in the splendour of the church. Everywhere and at all times, in every place and situation, a fresh opportunity lurks for everyone to experience the embrace of the Theotokos. In all probability, there is no Athonite monk who has not experienced the Mother of God as his mother, as his foremost and principal recourse, as his steadfast hope, safety, and protection, as his intercessor and loyal companion, as comforter of his pains and trials.

A chanter begins his first lesson with the celebrated hymn *Axion estin* ('It is meet') and tries his utmost to render it as best he can. The principal and finest works of every iconographer and wood-carver portray the person of the Theotokos. Every hermit offers his most fervent prayer to her. Each monastery demonstrates its utmost reverence to her icons.

Historical facts, daily needs, living miracles, incidents and coincidences, features and qualities of the Theotokos are depicted in every icon that adorns with its beauty and consoles with its presence each of the monasteries on the Holy Mountain. Thus, apart from the *Axion estin* ('It is meet') at the Protaton or the *Portaïtissa* ('Door keeper') at Iviron monastery, mention may also be made of the Theotokos of the Akathist Hymn at the monastery of Dionysiou, the Myrrh-bearer at St Paul's monastery, the *Tricherousa* ('With three hands') at Chilandar, the *Gorgoypekoos* ('Quick-to-hear') at Dochiariou monastery, the *Hodegetria* ('Guide') at the monastery of Xenophontos, the *Paramythia* ('Comforter') at Vatopedi, as well as many others.

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[27] Nikodemos the Hagiorite, *Chanted Office of the Righteous and God-bearing Fathers of the Holy Mountain.*

[28] St Gregory Palamas, 'Life of Righteous Peter the Athonite', *PG* 150.1005.

Just as the Prophet Elijah cast his cape to the Prophet Elisha, so the Holy Girdle of the Theotokos, preserved at the monastery of Vatopedi, constitutes a priceless heritage and blessing that makes the Holy Mountain worthy to be her garden and dwelling place. 'Rejoice, O holy and God-trodden mountain', chants the hymnographer,[29] poetically identifying the Mother of God with the Mountain itself. The Theotokos is not only found on the Holy Mountain; she *is* the Holy Mountain.

Writings of great theological and spiritual significance, the fruit of Athonite saints, refer to her person. Examples, including the famous homilies of St Gregory Palamas on the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, the canon of St Nikodimos to the Mother of God, Quick-to-hear, and the *Theotokarion* with all its references to her person, encompass both theological depth and love for God.

Moreover, contemporary holy fathers, known and unknown, express their faith and theology through the person of the Mother of God. Of Elder Joseph the Hesychast it has been written,

> His love for our Mother of God is beyond description. Merely by pronouncing her name his eyes flooded with tears. He begged her for a long time to repose his soul. The Queen of All heard him and informed him one month prior to his departure from this life.[30]

His death took place on 15 August 1959, the day of her dormition.

The ever memorable hieromonk Athanasios of Iviron articulates his own special reverence to the person of the Mother of God in a letter to the monk Theoklitos of Dionysiou:

> Always begin with the Mother of God [...] Observe this thought; it came to me while reading the *Theotokarion*. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the Akathist Hymn and the *Theotokarion* shall never be omitted throughout the

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[29] Respond of the 1st Kathisma, for Sunday Matins , Mode I Plagal.

[30] Ephraim of Philotheou, Prologue to Elder Joseph, *Expression of Monastic Experience* (in Greek) (Mount Athos, 1985), p. 22.

> year, not even for a single day. To whom are these hymns dedicated? To the dispenser of all the graces of God.[31]

The Necessity of 'Signs'

The second element that characterizes Athonite spirituality is the necessity for a divine sign. The Holy Mountain is full of miracles: holy relics that emanate fragrances, legends and stories related to icons, supernatural events, charismatic monks, appearances of saints, miraculously solved problems, submission of natural forces, and deceased bodies that maintain their suppleness and exhibit no sign of decomposition. All of the above blend so naturally with daily life on Mount Athos that God is no longer a distant, rare miracle, but a transcendental truth and reality that can be sensed easily by those who have their eyes and hearts open. Thus, pilgrims are introduced to the spiritual life, which is based on the following biblical saying, 'for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world'.[32]

The spirituality of the Holy Mountain is not determined by correct teachings, intellectual theology, wise advice, human commandments, superficial obedience, or other factors that invariably lead to self-righteousness. Rather, it is based on the experience of the presence of God, which, unless deceiving, rejuvenates faith. Salvation is not an achievement; it is the grace and gift of God.

Those in search of salvation, therefore, everywhere and at all times seek out the footprints of God. They begin by experiencing a godly sign and continue hoping for and anticipating its repetition and verification. Our aim is not to become good or acceptable persons, nor do we strive to experience signs that we ourselves ask from God. Instead, we wait to 'be given the sign of the prophet Jonah' and must recognize it.[33]

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[31] Theoklitos of Dionysiou, *Hieromonk Athanasios Iviritis (1851–1973)* (in Greek) (Thessaloniki, 1986).

[32] John 4:42.

[33] 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah' (Matt. 12:39).

Athonite life and experience is marked by heavenly signs, which are proffered as natural consequences, not as surprising exceptions. They do not astonish, but simply reveal the living God. The 'sign of Jonah' is given to every person of faith, whose calling is not to acknowledge the power of an impersonal deity, but to encounter the personal God who knows how to respond to our requests, how to violate his own laws,[34] how to transcend our desires,[35] how to grant things that are good in accordance with our inner disposition, how to give signs to our brethren, and how to multiply his gifts in our own lives.

Occasionally, God responds even to unusual requests and reveals his presence in ways that could be considered less than serious. Thus, when Fr Ioakeim of the skete of St Anne, an upholder of tradition and more especially of the traditional outward appearance of the clergy, prayed to the Mother of God, she replied by miraculously providing him with a supernatural beard reaching down to the ground.[36]

The Diversity of Pentecost

In Orthodox life and tradition, spirituality is the experience and revelation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, however, comes in the form of many and 'diverse languages'.[37] On the Holy Mountain, spiritual life is distinguished by its respect for the variety of divine gifts.

Every corner discloses a message of its own. Not only does the coenobium differ from the desert, but each cell, skete, hermitage, and monk is different from the next. One experiences the mystery of God on Athos not as compliance with a number of absolute rules, the convergence of viewpoints, impressive resemblances, or wondrous coincidences, but as serene dissimilarity, unexpected variety, the coexistence of conflicting personalities, and a symphony of incompatible characters. Everyone and everything is expressed unpretentiously and effortlessly.

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[34] 'Where God so wills, the order of nature is overcome', Christmas Matins, 2nd Kathisma .

[35] 'Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think' (Eph. 3:20).

[36] Archimandrite Cherubim, *Contemporary Ascetics of Mount Athos*, vol. 1 (Platina, CA, 1992), p. 84.

[37] Acts 2:3.

The Athonite spiritual ethos makes no attempt to convince or restrict people to specific guidelines. Neither does it impose responsibilities or propose precisely which goals are to be reached. There are no harsh reprimands. On the contrary, by talking about their own lives and experiences of God, the monks become living examples, often so remarkable that they open for you the road to repentance.

It is noteworthy that, on the day of Pentecost, while Peter directly places the blame on those who crucified the Lord, he does not admonish them with severe words[38] but speaks to them as if they had not realized the gravity of their actions.[39] Similar experiences may occur on the Holy Mountain. We may hear the truth about ourselves, but it does not injure our self-esteem; reasoning this way, we can more easily turn to repentance.

Moreover, there is no implicit obligation to imitate any preexisting good; we are rather enjoined to beget our own true gifts that wait to be manifested. Each monk is different. He maintains his own traits and submits his own person. On the Holy Mountain there are many versions of what is good. However, what underlines the authenticity of truth is the range of expressions, the differences of character, even the divergence of viewpoints.

As a result, spirituality on Mount Athos is distinguished by its freedom. God's will is not accompanied by fear or insecurity. There are ethical rules to confirm spiritual love and suggest directions, but none that sets limits or protects. Ethics is not a precisely defined goal, but a natural consequence freely lived, for one chooses whatever expresses the will of God. Consequently, the reality of human failing does not affect Athonite spirituality; neither do the weaknesses of the monks seem strange. They exist to make one humble.

Apart from freedom of choice and consent, there is also the freedom of risk and daring. Those who live the monastic life in perfection, those who 'always carry in their body the death of Jesus',[40] are free from conventionality, compromise, and the pressure of time. Cleaving, on the one hand, to the past of history and tradition, and, on the other, to the eschatological future, they break all ties with the present. Every monk, every building, every act of creation, anything you see or hear, at once reminds you of a past Byzantine grandeur and refers you to the eternal glory, the age to come.

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[38] [T]his Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men' (Acts 2:23, 36).

[39] The Lord's phrase, 'for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34), is confirmed by Peter's manner and words.

Athonite spirituality is also epitomized through discriminating aesthetics. Throughout history, the strict monastic routine has given rise to all forms of art, such as music, hymnography, painting, and so forth. Behind every minute detail in the monks' conduct, spiritual expression, and artistic creation one discovers a spare simplicity, a subtle beauty and nobility. In order for God to be true he ought to be 'more beautiful than any human being'[41] and his ways should be 'as a still small voice'.[42]

On the Holy Mountain you experience the 'fear provoked by the signs of the apostles',[43] you find opportunity to repent, you taste the diversity in the grace of God and feel his freedom and love; it is the foretaste of Pentecost.

Ascetic Extremity and an Uncompromising Spirit

Mount Athos is the centre *par excellence* of ascetic and hesychastic monasticism, having been formed according to – and being based on – Orthodox tradition and experience. To this day, it is the place where asceticism exceeds human measure, where an uncompromising spirit prevails.

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[40] 2 Cor. 4:10.

[41] *Triodion*, Matins of Great and Holy Tuesday.

[42] 'Behold a great and strong wind [...] but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice, and the Lord was there' (1 Kings 19: 11, 12).

[43] Acts 2:43.

In all creation, human nature is that which most approaches God and which possesses the greatest potential for *theosis* (deification).[44] True living is being both close to the kingdom of God and alienated from the world. Man is not the greatest reality, neither is temptation the world's ruler, nor does the tide of events affect life. Death is no longer viewed as a threat. On the Mountain one *chooses* death, and its occurrence, considered a blessing, is eagerly awaited. The passing of events simply reminds us of the ephemeral and transient character of earthly life. The devil exists in order to be conquered, while God lives and is revealed in order to be praised.

This extreme and absolute quest for God is apparent in every aspect of Athonite life. The present *typika* are of the strictest order. The same applies to the monastic diet. Services are long: sometimes they last more than sixteen hours. Gifted monks freely sacrifice their talents on the altars of obedience, daily monotony, and humility, denying their nature 'for the attainment of what is above nature'.[45]

In the narthex of Esphigmenou monastery's katholikon, an icon of a crucified monk occupies a prominent position. Its presence there is not only to stimulate prudence through fear but also to indicate that the true glory of every monk, of every person of faith, is voluntary cross-bearing.[46] Dying every day[47] and keeping one's mind in hell without despairing[48] define the character of spiritual life on the Holy Mountain, one which is free from death, fear, and the heaviness of human nature.

At St Paul's monastery I met such men of great exertion, monks with rare virtues. I shall mention just one of them, Fr George, whose cell was right next to mine. His uncompromising struggle to acquire unceasing prayer, his insistence on remaining upright during the very long services in spite of old age and an unbearable back pain, his abstinence from washing and endurance of dirt and untidiness made up only one part of his asceticism. His abandoned cell smelled almost as unpleasantly as his body. You could sense it, even if you had a stuffed nose! His companions were his few icons, his worn-out prayer rope, and, unsurprisingly, a wide variety of insects and living creatures that found an adequate supply of food and hospitable shelter in his cell. Not infrequently, I too received visitors in my cell from his natural environment. Time and again bugs from Fr George's 'zoo' left their imprints on my well-bred body. To me this was an intolerable nuisance, though he never said a word about it. Admirable consistency, patience, and perseverance!

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[44] One can also find strict *typika* and high measures of asceticism at the monastery of Mar Saba or in the desert of Egypt. However, on the one hand, the environmental conditions, climate, etc. are more favourable and, on the other, one finds these features only in isolated circumstances.

[45] St John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 1, 'On Renunciation of the World' (Boston, 1991), p. 4.

[46] 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mark 8:34).

[47] 'I die every day' (1 Cor. 13:31).

[48] 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not', Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Tolleshunt Knights, 1991), p. 42.

I recall that in 1989 the monastery sent both of us together with a novice to act as its representatives for the feast of St Athanasios at the Great Lavra. The novice and I were driven down to the wharf while Fr George – then eighty years old – came on foot. On board the boat, I spied him in a corner, literally enveloped in his prayer rope, with his head bent. He neither wasted his words with us, nor did he devour the treasure of his quietude.

As soon as we arrived at our destination, a waiting lorry transferred us from the wharf to the monastery, otherwise a near forty-minute walk uphill. Fr George had disappeared. When we arrived at the monastery, he refused not only to rest before the vigil, but also to leave his bag in the room where our monastery's delegation would be staying. 'We did not come here to rest, sleep, or be honoured. We came here for labour, vigil, and humbleness. This is the only way to move our saint', he said.

He went straight to church. It was 7 o'clock in the evening. The vigil began at 9 pm on the eve of the feast and ended, with the meal in the refectory, at 12.30 pm the next day. Fr George did not leave the church at all, not even for a minute, but remained awake, struggling and praying in his stall, upright for more than seventeen hours.

The boat departed at 5 o'clock in the afternoon to take us back to St Paul's. We arrived at the monastery's jetty at around 6 pm. My heroic neighbour walked beside me. His eyes were completely red, his soul snow white, and his life fruitful. He also refused to travel by the jeep that waited for us, simultaneously continuing the ascent of his steadfastness, the ascent of his sanctification.

I was ashamed of my poverty and felt the urge to imitate him; but it was impossible. He was eighty years old; I was under forty. With twice my years Fr George possessed a mass of spiritual vigour and an abundance of divine grace. God relieved him of his earthly labours in 1998, thereby fulfilling his heavenly yearnings eternally.

Some time later I was told that in 1963, as a representative of his monastery, he had reacted violently against the construction of the first road on the Holy Mountain, the one from Daphne to Karyes which was built to facilitate the transportation of patriarchs, kings, and officials during the celebrations of the millennium. Consistent with his viewpoint at the time, he never boarded a car within the borders of the Holy Mountain.

A visit to the hermitage of St Basil and to the smaller dwellings in the wilderness of Katounakia and Karoulia provides plenty of examples of spiritual heroism, transcendent nature, and limitless, unobstructed love for God.[49] Even those negatively disposed towards God, faith, and the Church acknowledge the awe that strikes them when looking at the face of the sanctified man who reveals God in human form.

At the same time, the tradition of the Holy Mountain has also been adorned by the lives of saints, known and unknown, who were fools for Christ. In essence, every Athonite monk is 'a fool for Christ';[50] the Holy Mountain operates with a totally different logic from that of the world, the logic of the 'folly of the cross';[51] the logic of the person who, when his coat is taken, also gives his cloak;[52] who, in order to save his life, loses it;[53] who consciously chooses the state of the blessed poor;[54] who is 'last'[55] of all, 'servant'[56] to all, and 'the least among all'.[57] Life on the Holy Mountain has no connection with conventionality or compromise; consequently its 'transcended' logic is liberating and saving.

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[49] St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain describes the relationship with nature in the Doxological Hymn of Matins in the Chanted Office for the Righteous and God-bearing Fathers of the Holy Mountain: 'they escaped whatever is contrary to nature, preserved what is by nature, and mainly became worthy of gifts beyond nature.'

[50] 1 Cor. 4:10.

[51] 1 Cor. 1:18.

[52] Matt. 5:40.

Athonite spirituality rises above ethics as well. Monks live a state of 'perfect love that casts out fear'.[58] The commandments are kept out of faith and love, 'not reluctantly or under compulsion'.[59] On the Holy Mountain, one realizes fully what it means to be a 'cheerful giver';[60] hence feelings such as guilt, remorse, threat, liability, fear, and insecurity are entirely absent.

The Mountain inspires because of its humbleness and contrition before the mystery of God and man. God's will is not an imposed, ethical command; it is unrevealed; you have to discover it within you. For this reason, the genuine Athonite monk does not have answers to all questions, neither does he offer solutions to all dilemmas, or come up with superficial arguments. He does not speak on all matters but talks more with his silence and prayers than with astute remarks and clear-cut replies. Knowledge before the unknown mystery generates insolence, while respect for not knowing is a sign of humility.

The same applies to sin, the sinner, and the blameworthy. The Athonite monk feels the sin of his fellow man as his own but without experiencing a sense of guilt. He simply feels close to every one of his brethren and stands before God as if he were partaking in the sins of the world. Spirituality on the Holy Mountain means to experience the humility of silence and the freedom of not knowing.

[53] Matt. 16:25.

[54] Luke 6:20.

[55] Mark 10:31.

[56] Matt. 20:26.

[57] Luke 9:48.

[58] 1 John 4:18.

[59] 2 Cor. 9:7.

[60] Ibid.

Prayer and Theology

Mount Athos is exclusively linked to the theology of the second millennium, a theology that is marked by a Hagioritic seal.

The hesychast tradition was preserved and cultivated on the Mountain where its main representative was St Gregory Palamas, later Archbishop of Thessaloniki. Other great fourteenth-century teachers of the hesychast tradition were Nikephoros the Recluse, Theoleptos of Philadelphia, Gregory of Sinai, Philotheos Kokkinos, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos who were also associated with Athos in one way or another.[61]

Later, in the eighteenth century, one encounters the flourishing Philokalic tradition with St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and Paisy Velichkovsky, who made the *Philokalia* known to the Slavs, as well as the members of the Kollyvades movement.

The theological wealth of the Holy Mountain is maintained till today by recent and contemporary monastic scholars, such as the Archbishop of Brussels, Vasili Krivochein, St Silouan, Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, Elder Joseph the Hesychast, Fr Theoklitos of Dionysiou, and the Elders Aimilianos of Simonopetra, Georgios of Grigoriou, and Vasileios of Iviron. Each has sanctioned his Athonite experience with a theological character of pan-Orthodox, universal dimension.

More popular expressions of theology have best been represented by the Serbian Sts Sava and Symeon (twelfth century), the Russian St Nil Sorsky (1433–1508), St Kosmas the Aetolian (1714–79), and many others including our contemporary Fr Paisios. Their words, filled with theological insight, have everywhere touched the hearts of thirsty people, preserved our faith, mingled enlightened word with living experience, and shifted theology from the level of speculation to personal life.

This constant enrichment of life with theology and of theological knowledge with hesychastic experience, contemplation, ascetic struggle, and charismatic prayer comprises the most authentic and profound aspect of the relationship between human beings and God. Thus, prayer on Mount Athos is not only a daily rule or duty, but 'by reason of its nature, it is the converse and union of man with God, and by reason of its action upholds the world and brings about reconciliation with God'.[62]

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[61] C. Cavarnos, *The Holy Mountain* (Belmont, MA, 1973), pp. 17–42.

Direct and continuous contact with the sacred relics, experience of their grace, and the blessing of the saints' physical presence confirm these sanctified bones as a familiar element of monastic life. Monks speak about the saints as we speak about the living. In the event of a fire, before rushing to protect ancient precious heirlooms, the fathers strive to rescue the holy relics, which are of the greatest value for the monasteries.

The Holy Mountain is the greatest reliquary in the world. According to historical accounts, in the year AD 400, during the reign of Emperor Arkadios, a vast number of holy relics were brought from Jerusalem as a blessing to Constantinople.[63] After the city's capture by the Turks in 1453, most of these holy relics were sent by various routes to the Holy Mountain. Together with the blessed remains of the departed monks, kept in the ossuaries, saints' relics provide a preeminent illustration of 'philosophy' in Christ at the 'university' of spirituality on the Holy Mountain. When looking at these bones, you see life projected on the level of death; when venerating them, death is projected to the level of true life.

Thus, visiting the Holy Mountain, you quickly realize that you are not there to observe, relax, or learn. On the Mountain you are initiated; you keep silent and pray; your preference is to free yourself to yearn for and seek out your inner world,[64] without feeling the need to see, confirm, and know. Perceiving wonders, you avoid probing into them. Sensing the mystery, you refuse to investigate it.[65] Faith is stronger than any proof. The sense of God's presence is more intense than any blessed encounter. As a result, there is little need to become acquainted with the saintly monks in a worldly way. It suffices that they are there. Better that your questions be answered through their prayers rather than through their wise advice.

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[62] St John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 28, 'On Holy and Blessed Prayer, the Mother of Virtues, and on the Attitude of Mind and Body in Prayer' (Boston, 1991), p. 212.

[63] These holy relics remained there until the city was captured by the Franks in 1204. For reasons of security, they were kept along with other heirlooms and treasures at Nicaea in Bithynia, the temporary capital of Byzantium. They were returned to Constantinople during the reign of Michael Palaeologos. See *The Gifts of the Magi – Emanation of Grace until the Present* (in Greek), (Mount Athos, 1990), pp. 8–9).

[64] 'I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit' (Ps. 77:6).

The Elder and Spiritual Guidance

One last feature of Athonite spirituality concerns the gifts of the saintly and enlightened elders. Throughout its long history, the weight of the Holy Mountain's spiritual development has been shouldered by prudent, saintly monks who – like Moses living in the divine darkness of God's grace – have led people to the Jerusalem on high, taught them mental prayer, guided them in practical life, strengthened them during trials, struggled against the temptations of others, exceeded the 'measure of humanity', and implored God so that 'he may lift up his arm to put the sword back in its place'.[66]

Thus, in recent years, spiritual fathers, such as Savvas and Ignatios, Gabriel of Dionysiou, Daniel of Katounakia, Fr Sophrony Sakharov, and elders like Kallinikos and Joseph the hesychasts, Ephraim of Katounakia, Fr Paisios, Fr Ephraim of Philotheou, together with other contemporary abbots sustained not only a multitude of monks but also the people of God. They enriched them with the ethos of Athonite spirituality, enlivened the entire Church with the patristic way of thinking, contributed to the renaissance and blossoming of Athonite and Greek monastic life, 'nurtured numerous monks in saving pastures',[67] gave witness to the Orthodox word in the West, assisted in missionary efforts throughout the world (Calabria, Congo, India, Taiwan, etc.), consoled the injured, breathed faith into thousands of people otherwise lost, and enlightened them with their wisdom and grace in their quest for God.

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[65] 'We cannot fathom this mystery', Christmas Matins, 3rd Troparion at Lauds.

[66] St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain, *Bible of Barsanouphios and John*, 'Reply 569' (Thessaloniki, 1974), p. 267.

They based their wise sermons on the inner peace of the faithful.[68] Although an ascetic looks unusually coarse and lives as a recluse, wearing worn-out clothes and lacking in human consolation, his soul is extremely gentle, innocent, and childlike. Alienated from the world, a stranger to all things secular, unaffected by the things of this world, technology, new habits, life's necessities, liberated from professional antagonism, devoid of the knowledge and experience of family life, he is yet 'separated from everyone and related to all'.[69] His speech is timely, explicit, and prudent and 'always gracious, seasoned with salt'.[70] He lives even now in the kingdom of God, but 'is determined to go even to hell for the love of his spiritual children'.[71]

Kissing his hand, you often smell a mixture of sweat, dust, and time; but you prefer it to anything else, for it is the natural fragrance of ascetic labour and of the tears of prayer. It amounts to a proof of inner purity. The skeletal ascetic body is that which most resembles the body of eternity. Near him you feel serene, rested; you detect your depths. You can perceive faintly the mystery of God.

Every encounter with him is a revelation of God, his descent to the Mount Sinai of your soul. At this moment you sense with awe that he watches it 'wrapped in smoke',[72] in the darkness, like Moses. He does not rush to advise, he neither disturbs the sacredness of the moment with his own thoughts, nor attempts to offer assistance by imposing his presence (which in any event was in all probability involuntary). This time belongs to God, not to him. He remains quiet and prays. He experiences the descent of God to the soul, without attempting to enter its sanctuary. This is why he does not tire or tire others; he has inner peace, which he transmits to those with him.

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[67] Id., *Chanted Office of the Righteous and God-bearing Fathers of the Holy Mountain*, Troparion at Lauds.

[68] 'When you wish to preach good to someone, first grant him inner peace', Abba Isaac, *Ascetics*, 73rd Homily: 'On Beneficial Advice' (Thessaloniki, 1977), p. 291.

[69] Neilos the Ascetic, 'Homily on Prayer', *Philokalia of the Holy Neptic Fathers*, vol. 1 (Athens, 1982), p. 187.

[70] Col. 4:6.

[71] Elder Paisios the Athonite, *Homilies* III: 'Spiritual Struggle' (in Greek) (Thessaloniki, 2001), p. 292.

[72] Exod. 19:18.

The Uniqueness of the Athonite Monk

As Graham Speake writes,

> On Athos things are not always what they seem to be, and people do not always think or behave in the way you expect them to. A different set of assumptions needs to be applied [...] It does not mean that they are demented or brainwashed or naïve: they simply do things differently there.[73]

Differentiation in conduct, life, and spirit underlines the uniqueness of the Mountain that I mentioned earlier and offers the opportunity for one to taste a great many things simultaneously. A fullness and wholeness of experience inform the high standing of its spirituality.

Everything that the Holy Mountain has to offer is, to monks and pilgrims alike, accessible as wonder and surprise, as an unprecedented encounter from which you cannot flee. Its message extends beyond conception. It inspires you and stirs within you unexpected visions and hope. How marvellous it is to live the spiritual life as a constant godly surprise!

This environment of unique features – nature, relics, time, lifestyle, habits, forms of worship, the *avaton*, and various manifestations of spiritual life – does not give the impression of a peculiar world, attract the interest of dissatisfied believers, offer spiritual fulfilment to frustrated Christians, or become a refuge for souls in need of consolation. It exists to give birth to a wondrous creation, called the 'Athonite' monk.

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[73] G. Speake, *Mount Athos*, p. 17.

> [He] lives as an overseer of the visible world and an initiator of the invisible and noetic creation; as an image created by God and in the likeness of God; he rejoices in being alive and the delight of his heart is unceasing. His entire self flows in uncreated, spiritual light; his mind is simple, pure, full of love, immortal, free and creative. He is a small god by grace, a king of creation.[74]

Near him, his unaffected life, his authentic faith, his spontaneous feelings, his transcendent logic, his otherworldly expressions, you feel different yet related to him, human yet with godly perspective, insignificant yet consoled, respectful yet friendly. Near him you forgive, you believe, you are comforted, you hope. You live the godly experience, eternity, miracles, the grace of God. Near him you yearn for sanctification. You see him dominated by the 'newness of knowledge', speaking the dialect of 'other tongues', worthy of receiving 'the secret vision', and benefiting from 'strange hearings'.[75] Near him you live. On the Holy Mountain you experience the Holy Spirit. Even today…[76]

Every encounter with an Athonite elder resembles a contact with Moses – who saw God. It makes your life a Mount Sinai where God's 'back'[77] can be seen; it transforms it into Mount Tabor where his voice can be heard;[78] it converts it into a Holy Mountain where his presence is confirmed.

We perceive all of these fundamental features upon a first visit to the Holy Mountain, whereupon we become conscious of the fact that we can neither quench our vision nor articulate our perceptions. The Holy Mountain – through revelations of its mystery – confers the awareness that it is one of a kind, a *holy* place. If *holy* means to 'stand apart', then it truly is holy. If it means to be blessed by God, then it is very holy. If it means to be beyond what is possible or even desirable by human nature, then the Holy Mountain is unquestionably a *most* holy place.

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[74] Theoklitos of Dionysiou, *Between Heaven and Earth* (in Greek) (Athens, 1986), pp. 21–2.

[75] Pentecost Matins, 3rd Troparion, at Lauds.

[76] N. Hatzinikolaou, *The Holy Mountain*, p. 146.

[77] Exod. 33:23.

[78] Matt. 17:5.

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ANDREW LOUTH

St Gregory Palamas and the Holy Mountain

The subject of this paper – St Gregory Palamas and the Holy Mountain – seems deceptively obvious. Although in his life he had other concerns than the Holy Mountain of Athos and its communities – for his last ten years he was Archbishop of Thessaloniki, and though he spent the first three of those years on the Holy Mountain, and a few years later spent about a twelvemonth a prisoner of the Turks, for the rest of that time he was deeply concerned with his people and their pastoral problems, as his homilies bear witness – it is because of his connection with the Holy Mountain and his defence of the Athonite monks in the hesychast controversy that he is remembered today. Nevertheless, his links with the Holy Mountain, though real, are curiously elusive. He first made his way to the Holy Mountain when he was about eighteen, in 1314, and placed himself under the direction of a hermit called Nikodimos, who lived in a hermitage near Vatopedi. It was there that he was tonsured, which is the basis of his link with the monastery of Vatopedi. But after a couple of years he was at the Great Lavra, where he spent four years, 1316–20, after which he spent two years at the hermitage of Glossia. After the Turkish invasion of the Holy Mountain in 1322, he – with many other monks – fled to Thessaloniki, where he spent four years, during which he was ordained priest. In 1326 he became a hermit at Veroia, where he stayed for five years, living a kind of lavritic life – from Monday to Friday on his own in silent withdrawal, while at the weekends he met other brethren and participated in the Divine Liturgy. In 1331 Serb incursions into the area led him to return to the Holy Mountain, where he became a hermit at St Sabas, a dependency of the Great Lavra; there he was to stay for most of the next seven years, with a brief period as abbot of the monastery of Esphigmenou. From 1338 to 1341 he was back again in Thessaloniki, living as a hermit. In the 1340s he spent some time at a monastery outside Constantinople, St Michael of Sosthenion, and then in late 1344 was imprisoned and excommunicated. In 1347 he was vindicated and consecrated Archbishop of Thessaloniki, though, as we have seen, he spent the first three years of his archiepiscopate, when Thessaloniki was still held by the zealots, on the Holy Mountain.

St Gregory Palamas, then, began his monastic life on the Holy Mountain, and spent many years there, at one time or another, but he spent as many years elsewhere. But that is mere geography. However, when we look for spiritual links with the Holy Mountain, there is a similar elusiveness. The first Athonite connected with Palamas we can give a name to is Nikodimos, under whose tutelage he began his monastic life, but we know very little about him. Philotheos Kokkinos, in his life of the saint, says that while Gregory was at Glossia his spiritual father was one 'Gregory the Great', a monk from Constantinople, who returned there to die and whose relics were a source of miracles; Nikephoros Gregoras tells us he bore the name Drimys, but that is all we know about him. It is unlikely that he was identical with Gregory of Sinai. It is often claimed – on the basis of St Gregory's own words and those of his biographer, Philotheos Kokkinos – that his spiritual mentor was Theoleptos of Philadelphia, but, as the Basilian priest Fr Robert Sinkewicz has shown, the only time when Gregory can have met Theoleptos, who was nearly fifty years older than him, was in 1307 or 1308, when Theoleptos was in Constantinople: Gregory would have been there then, as a boy of eleven or twelve. What Gregory actually says, in the *Triads*, is this:

> Certain men, who have born witness shortly before our time and who have been recognized as possessing the power of the Holy Spirit, have passed these teachings on to us by word of mouth; in particular, this theologian, this veritable theologian and surest visionary of the true mysteries of God, who was famous in our day; I refer to the well-named Theoleptos, bishop of Philadelphia, or rather, one who from there illumined the world as from a lampstand.[1]

What is most likely to have happened is that the young Gregory's meeting with the saintly bishop made a profound impression on him.

[1] *Triad* 1. 2. 12.

That, of course, does not exclude the possibility – indeed, it renders it probable – that, later on in his life, the memory of that impression led Gregory to read with some care the works of the bishop; so, though the occasion of their meeting may have been fleeting, the depth of the impression could have been quite considerable. Theoleptos's link with the Holy Mountain is even more elusive than Gregory's: a married man and a deacon, he withdrew from the world after the Union Synod of Lyon of 1274, but it is unclear whether he spent any time on the Holy Mountain during the period before he became Bishop of Philadelphia in 1283, though Philotheos Kokkinos claims that he was on the Holy Mountain when called to become a bishop. St Gregory Palamas himself claims that one of Theoleptos's spiritual mentors was Nikephoros the Hesychast, an Athonite monk, though their contact seems to belong to the period when they were both in prison in Constantinople in the spring of 1276. But Athonite spirituality was not confined to the Holy Mountain; we shall come back to Theoleptos.

The biggest puzzle about Gregory Palamas's links on the Holy Mountain, however, concerns his relationship with St Gregory of Sinai. Two of Palamas's periods on the Holy Mountain coincide with periods when Gregory of Sinai is known to have been there: Palamas's first period, and the 1330s; they are associated with the same area of the Holy Mountain – the north-eastern side, between Iviron and the Great Lavra; Gregory of Sinai's disciples were supporters of Palamas and some of them were signatories of the *Hagioritic Tome*; and Palamas gave the monastic tonsure to Gregory of Sinai's spiritual son, Isidore. But despite all this, there is no mention of any direct personal contact between the two men. Nonetheless, the life that Gregory the Sinaite lived – away from all controversy, and explained in practical terms to his spiritual children, monastic and otherwise – was the life that Gregory Palamas defended in the thick of controversy, and finally as a hierarch of the Church.

A biographical treatment of the subject of this paper is, therefore, not possible: there are suggestive hints, but little that is substantial; any attempt to evoke Gregory's links with the Holy Mountain in biographical terms would be largely fictional – and maybe none the worse for that; but I am not a novelist. Instead, we must try to elucidate our subject in theological terms, and that is what I shall try to do in the rest of the paper.

As Fr John Meyendorff makes clear in his account of the course of the controversies in which Palamas became engaged from the mid-1330s in the middle of his second period on the Holy Mountain, Gregory's encounter with the Calabrian monk Barlaam from the very beginning involved matters of both doctrine and spirituality: initially, the doctrine was the question of the *filioque*, and the spirituality was the claim of the hesychasts to have tangible experience of divine grace in their prayer.[2] The link may be even closer than Fr Meyendorff argued if, as Fr Sinkewicz has proposed, Barlaam's treatises on the procession of the Holy Spirit belong, not to the late 1330s, but to around 1334:[3] from the very beginning, Barlaam appeared to Palamas as a representative of an intellectual agnosticism, rather than a theological apophaticism. What Barlaam had argued in relation to the *filioque* was that the unknowability of God is such that we cannot demonstrate anything in the realm of *theologia*: we must simply rely on the tradition of the Fathers. This was, and continued to be, a respectable, indeed a popular, position among Byzantine theologians, even those who supported Palamas. A good example of this position is to be found in Neilos Cabasilas, a staunch supporter of Palamas, mentioned alongside him in the additions to the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, who briefly succeeded Gregory as Archbishop of Thessaloniki. In the 1350s he wrote five treatises in defence of the Orthodox doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit, especially against the arguments of Thomas Aquinas, by then available in Greek. These not only take Barlaam's agnostic line about argumentation in *theologia*, but actually cite (without acknowledgement) whole passages from Barlaam's own treatises on the Holy Spirit. Neilos's argument is essentially an argument from Scripture and tradition; he displays enormous learning in the tradition of the Greek Fathers over the matter of the procession of the Spirit, a learning on which the Greek theologians at the Council of Florence leant heavily.[4] Palamas's line was quite different: for him it *is* possible to advance our understanding in matters of *theologia*; we are not limited simply to assembling witnesses from the Fathers, but may also argue from Scripture and from what the Fathers said, and reach demonstrative conclusions: which is why Palamas's treatises on the Holy Spirit are called 'apodictic', *demonstrative*.

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[2] J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959), pp. 65ff.

[3] See R. E. Sinkewicz, 'A New Interpretation for the First Episode in the Controversy between Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Palamas', *JTS* NS 31 (1980), 489–500; and idem, in G.C. and V. Conticello (eds), *La Théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. 2 (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 132f.

The question of the *filioque* was a debate of long standing, but the other matter, that of spirituality, was not an issue completely new either: Barlaam was raising issues about the practices and claims of the hesychast monks that had been raised earlier. The evidence for this comes from Theoleptos, to whom I want to devote a little time. Theoleptos's *Monastic Discourses*[5] belong to the first couple of decades of the fourteenth century, and were written for the Princess Eirene Choumnaina Palaiologina, who after the death of her husband had been tonsured a nun by Theoleptos, taking the name Eulogia, and had restored the monastery of Philanthropos Soter in Constantinople, to which she belonged. The second of these discourses defends the life of prayer against those who attack the monastic life by claiming that 'these spiritual people are making impossible claims, regarding the saving words proclaimed by them more as verbal figments than as mystical realities; or, consumed by jealousy, [disparaging] spiritual activity as delusion and [calling] them deceived who preach this in word and deed' (*MD* 2.2). Theoleptos in turn accuses those who thus attack the way of prayer as being 'weak-sighted' (2.1), or worse, to be compared with those Our Lord accused of sinning against the Spirit, by denying the manifest activity of the Holy Spirit (2.3). Theoleptos responds to these attacks by setting out the way of prayer under two headings: vigilance or watchfulness, *nepsis*, and prayer, *proseuche*.

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[4] See Nil Cabasilas, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par le Hiéromoine Théophile Kislas (Paris, 2001).

[5] Edited with translation and introduction by Robert E. Sinkewicz CSB: *Theoleptos of Philadelpheia, The Monastic Discourses* (Studies and Texts 111, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1992).

This division suggests, as the editor of the discourses Fr Sinkewicz remarks, the distinction, familiar from Evagrios, between *praxis* and *theoria*, and the substitution of *nepsis* for *praxis* further suggests the possible influence of Hesychios of the Burning Bush (Batos), one of the monastic fathers of the hesychast tradition, whose *On Watchfulness and Virtue* was included in the *Philokalia*. Watchfulness, says Theoleptos, means 'the cessation of distractions, control of thoughts, stability in the intellect, activation of reason, [...] purity of mind, an orderly moral life, wakefulness of soul' (2.15). Thus vigilance makes possible prayer, which 'raises the soul to heavenly things'. Prayer itself is personified and speaks in its own voice, giving in the rest of the treatise a kind of self-revelation of the nature of prayer, as 'work[ing] at the invocation of his much-loved name' (2.32): 'Ceaselessly uttering "Lord Jesus" in the depths of the soul, I [that is, prayer] conform the entire mind and the thoughts of the soul to contemplation of me and my recitation of the prayer and I find myself able to oppose the irrational passions and vulgar notions' (2.31). It is perhaps this focus on the Divine Name that makes the incarnation central to Theoleptos's understanding of prayer in a way that is not so obvious in someone like Evagrios, in whose tradition he otherwise so clearly stands. Through watchfulness and guarding his intellect, Theoleptos says that he learnt

> that the descent of God the Word to man has this purpose, namely, to free the rational faculty of the soul from irrational servitude to the passions and to bestow upon man once again the power taken from him by the enemy so that he may stand valiantly against sin and serve the living God in purity. And so I make my ascent through the incarnation of the Son of God to the denial of carnal pleasures and I am released from the bonds of pleasure (2.19).

The incarnation establishes a ladder between earth and heaven, of which humans can henceforth make use: 'the guarding of the discursive intellect [*he phylake tes dianoias*] appears like a ladder stretching upwards' (2.24: Sinkewicz, in his edition, notes the parallel in Hesychios who likens watchfulness to Jacob's ladder). Whoever experiences such prayer is filled with illumination, an illumination that extends to the discursive intellect (2.54), which suggests that some kind of understanding is extended to the one who prays. But this understanding is very different from learning as it is ordinarily understood. Earlier on, Theoleptos had asserted, 'the inner man is a speaker of a foreign language to the wise men of this world, an interpreter of the things above for those who make their home in heaven' (2.10), and this is a theme that recurs, for it is amongst those at home in the 'outer wisdom' that the critics of the hesychasts are to be found. Another shorter treatise, the sixth, 'On stillness [*hesychia*] and prayer', develops the experience of prayer in terms of love:

> Attentive prayer allows the knowledge of God to dawn in the soul. Divine knowledge draws to itself the love of the soul and joins the soul to God. Love rivets the entire heart to God and renders the mind's contemplation inseparable from the knowledge of God, for love constitutes the mind's bond with God and divine things (6.4).

Theoleptos even uses the image of the soul's being wounded with love, drawn from Song of Songs 2:5, a theme that had hardly been commented on in the Greek tradition since the fifth century, though it had been much developed more recently in the West from the twelfth century on: 'the soul that has received this arrow of love does not allow the mind to withdraw from this ineffable and divine pleasure [...] when the discursive intellect is pierced with the lance of divine love, it pours forth thoughts of life and light' (6.5). This theme of love receives a significant development in the twenty-third discourse, which seems to be a kind of spiritual testament for Eulogia and another nun called Agathoniki. There Theoleptos says,

> When God the Word fashioned the human mind with a faculty of reason, he joined to it also the power of love so that the natural word may use the soul's desire as an aid in performing good deeds, in order that the virtues applied to the soul, like colours to an icon, may assure the exact imitation of the divine likeness, and thus the Image and Likeness may be preserved. The Image is clearly manifest in the dignity of the word [*logos*], but love secures the divine Likeness. The word makes known the truth, for scripture says, 'Truth is the source of your words' [Ps. 118:160], but love builds up the virtues [cf. 1 Cor. 8:1]. All knowledge that is free of error has reference to the truth, but every good you do leads to love. Through knowledge of beings the word guides the mind towards the cause of beings, the true God, but, when love brings about union with God, it does not allow the mind to be distracted from the remembrance of God. Just as love clings to God, so too it prepares the mind for attach-

> ment to the contemplation of God. For scripture says, 'for me it is good to cling to God, to place my hope in the Lord' [Ps. 72:28]. (*MD* 23. 13–15)

The themes represented here are thoroughly traditional, but they are woven together in an impressive and original way. Particularly striking is the way Theoleptos has drawn the idea of love into his analysis of the structure of the soul, developing the triad of mind or intellect (*nous*), word or reason (*logos*), and love (*eros* or *agape*). The same triad already appears in his first discourse, where he says, 'when mind, word, and spirit are prostrate before God, the first by attention, the second by invocation [of the Name], and the third by compunction and love, then the entire inner man serves the Lord' (1. 18). What lies behind this is the triadic analysis of the soul into intellect, reason, and spirit, that goes back to the Cappadocian Fathers, St Gregory the Theologian and St Gregory of Nyssa, reappears in St Maximos the Confessor and St John of Damascus, and is found fitfully thereafter, not least in St Gregory Palamas himself.[6] Compared with the enormous influence of Augustine's psychological triad of *memoria*, *intellectus*, and *amor* or *voluntas* in Western theology, especially from the twelfth century onwards, this Eastern triad is a minor theme. But something that has fascinated a few students of late Byzantine theology since the publication of a critical edition of Manuel Planudes's translation into Greek of Augustine's *de Trinitate* is the way in which this authentically Eastern theme is woven with the Augustinian theme by Palamas, especially in his *150 Chapters*, where he evokes the traditional triadic image of the soul as mind, word, and spirit and draws the conclusion that, within the triune Godhead itself, divine love 'is the Holy Spirit and another [name for the] Paraclete and is so called by us'.[7] It seems to me not unlikely that it was Theoleptos's use of this triadic image that prepared the way for Gregory's reception of Augustine's ideas here.

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[6] See Robert E. Sinkewicz's introduction to St Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (Studies and Texts 83, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1988), pp. 22–4, who cites texts from Theodoret of Cyrus and Pseudo-Athanasios of Sinai. There is also a similar Trinitarian image consisting of soul, intellect, and reason (*psyche, nous, logos*, the latter confusingly translated as 'consciousness' in the English translation of the *Philokalia*) in Nikitas Stithatos ('Century of Spiritual Knowledge' 5–8; Engl trans. *Philokalia*, vol. 4 [London, 1995], pp. 140–1) (I owe this latter reference to Bishop Kallistos).

The point of this discussion of Theoleptos is that it gives us a little insight into the antecedents of the hesychast controversy with which St Gregory Palamas's name is so closely associated. From Gregory himself we learn the names of various hesychasts who taught before the outbreak of the controversy with Barlaam – apart from Theoleptos Gregory mentions Neilos of Italy, Seliotes, Elias, Gabriel, and Athanasios[8] – but all these are no more than names to us, apart from Theoleptos. What we have found in Theoleptos is interesting: there is the same criticism of the hesychasts in the name of the 'outer wisdom' (at any rate, Theoleptos, like Gregory, sees the critics in these terms), the same place given to the Jesus Prayer, the same defence of tangible grace and an experience of illumination, and the same appeal to the tradition that we know of from the later compilation of the *Philokalia*. There are also more particular similarities that are perhaps more surprising: I have mentioned their similar use of a triadic image in the soul in which the spirit manifests itself as love, which raises questions about how justified it is to see the defenders of the hesychasts as fundamentally anti-Western, given the parallels with the trinitarian thought of Augustine manifest here. This receptiveness to the West can be illustrated further in the case of Theoleptos. I have already mentioned the way that he draws on the theme of love in the Song of Songs which reminds one more of contemporary Western than contemporary Eastern theology. There is also a canon, ascribed in the *Great Horologion* to Theoktistos the Stoudite, but according to Sinkewicz[9] assigned in several manuscripts to Theoleptos, that, at first sight at any rate, reminds one, in its tender devotion to Jesus, of Western devotion from Bernard of Clairvaux onwards. The first troparion reads: 'O most sweet Jesus Christ, compassionate Jesus, heal the wounds of my soul, Jesus, and sweeten my heart, I beseech you, most merciful Jesus my Saviour, that, saved, I may magnify you.'[10] It seems to me that we have here at least one of those strange synchronisms between East and West – if not actual influence – that often strike one in studying the period from the seventh century onwards when Eastern and Western Christendom were beginning to pursue their own historical itineraries.

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[7] *150 Chapters* 37, see the whole section: 34–40. On the influence of Augustine on Palamas, see R. Flogaus, 'De heimliche Blick nach Westen. Zur Rezeption von Augustins De Trinitate durch Gregorios Palamas', *Jahrbuch für Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 46 (1996), 275–97; J. Lison, 'L'Esprit comme amour selon Grégoire Palamas. Une influence augustinienne?', *Studia Patristica*, 32 (1997), 325–31; J. Lössl, 'Augustine's De Trinitate in the 150 Chapters of Gregory Palamas', *Augustinian Studies*, 30 (1999), 61–82.

[8] *Triad* 1. 2. 12.

[9] Sinkewicz, *Theoleptos*, p. 24.

The other aspect of Theoleptos I want to mention here, as it leads me on to my next remarks, concerns the possible influence in the formation of his ideas of St John of Damascus. Immediately, there is his use of the comparatively rare psychological triad of mind, word, and spirit; but that Theoleptos respected – indeed revered – the Damascene saint is manifest in the fact that another of his liturgical compositions is in honour of St John himself.[11]

In my brief sketch of ideas from Theoleptos I mentioned the way he asserts that in prayer the discursive intellect, *dianoia*, is illuminated, and remarked that this must mean some illumination of knowledge, since that is the purpose of the discursive intellect. It is worth noting that such an emphasis on the illumination of the *dianoia* is unusual; we more normally read of the illumination of the heart (for instance in Hesychios of Vatos) or of the *nous* (for instance in Evagrios and those influenced by him). It is an unusual point, but significant in this context for the way it holds together devotion and theology, for prayer seems in some way to entail theological enlightenment. We may perhaps again detect here the influence of St John of Damascus, whose works were very popular in the late Byzantine period, not least his *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*,[12] for

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[10] *Horologion to Mega* (Athens, 1994), p. 449.

[11] See Sinkewicz, *Theoleptos*, p. 25.

[12] A work, however, usually known in this period, not as the third part of the *Fountain Head of Knowledge*, as it appears in most modern printed editions, but prefaced by the shorter version of the textbook of logic, the *Dialectica*, forming a work known as *150 Chapters* (of over 100 MSS containing some part at least of the *Fountain Head of Knowledge* on the Holy Mountain, about twen-

John, when he treats the doctrine of God in the first fourteen chapters of that work, both lays elaborate emphasis on the unknowability of God and the pre-eminence of apophatic theology, and also makes it clear that God has revealed himself in a way that the illuminated human intellect can make something of; indeed, for the Damascene, it is precisely as revealed that God is manifest in his unknowability. God reveals himself – through his creation, through his revelation in Scripture, and especially in the incarnation – as one who is beyond human comprehension, but at the heart of his revelation he is manifest as the Holy Trinity, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the revelation of the Holy Trinity is, as Vladimir Lossky put it, both the summit of cataphatic theology and also the threshold of apophatic theology.[13] Such apophaticism does not entail a doctrinal relativism, in which we are simply agnostic about the mystery of the Trinity, but discloses God who calls us to knowledge of and communion with himself, which the doctrine of the Trinity serves to safeguard. It is this distinction between an apophaticism that entails and is entailed by careful doctrinal – or dogmatic – definition of God as he reveals himself and an agnosticism about the mysteries of the faith masquerading as a humble recognition of the transcendence of the divine that lies at the heart of St Gregory Palamas's defence of the hesychasts of the Holy Mountain against Barlaam. And it is this same apophaticism about a God who makes himself known to us in experience that is adumbrated, it seems to me, in Theoleptos's earlier defence of the hesychasts, and still earlier in St John of Damascus's presentation of the mystery of the Godhead.

Right at the beginning of the controversy, when he had only learnt about Barlaam's agnosticism over the *filioque* and still knew

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ty give it in this form: see the list of MSS currently on Mount Athos listed and described in Bonifaz Kotter, 'Die Überlieferung der Pege Gnoseos des hl. Johannes von Damaskus', *Studia Patristica et Byzantina*, 5 (Ettal, 1959), pp. 10–19). Indeed it seems to me most probable that St Gregory Palamas adopted this form, and maybe even paid tribute to the Damascene saint, in his work known as *150 Chapters*.

[13] Cf. Vladimir Lossky, 'La notion des «analogies» chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 5 (1930), 279–309, p. 283.

little about his criticism of the hesychasts, Gregory Palamas seems to me to put his finger on the real nature of the issue between Barlaam and those who supported his criticism of the monks, on the one hand, and himself and the Athonite monks on the other. In his first letter to Barlaam, he says:

> It is not safe for those who do not know how to speak to God to speak about God, nor for those to judge about the immaterial light who do not know what can be apprehended beyond the light, and have not been initiated into the intellectual part of the soul and 'the life hidden in Christ' by the true and intellectual light, as having truly found and been raised to the first resurrection.[14]

'It is not safe for those who do know how to speak *to* God to speak *about* God': this is Palamas's fundamental theological premiss. It explains what seems at first sight a contradiction in his position: on the one hand, insisting against Barlaam that there can be demonstrative arguments in theology, and on the other hand, insisting, also against Barlaam, that Aristotelian logic cannot be an indispensable preliminary to theology. For God cannot be some sort of principle about which we can confidently argue from a position of merely human knowledge of the created order, but on the other hand those who know how to speak to God – who know how to pray, and not only know how to pray but have come to experience true prayer, true communion with God in prayer – can certainly reflect on what they have experienced, and come to some genuine knowledge on that basis. I am reminded of a point that the Catholic philosopher and lay theologian, Jean-Luc Marion, makes in the chapter on Dionysius the Areopagite in his book, *L'Idole et la distance*. There he suggests, in an argument that at first sight seems captious, but on reflection seems to me profound, that when Dionysius calls God '*aitia*' he is not identifying God as the cause or principle of the cosmos – for this would infringe his basic apophaticism, it would be to define God as some kind of worldly reality – rather he is identifying God as the object of our beseeching. Marion suggests that we should see the word '*aitia*', as applied to God, as derived from *aitein*, to beseech or request: he is the object of our beseeching, and *ta aitiata* – usually translated 'effects' – are to be seen as blessings given by God in answer to our beseeching, or indeed anticipating our requests: '*aitia*' and '*ta aitiata*' are not then to be translated 'cause' and 'effects', but the one we beseech (the 'ground of our beseeching' in the words of *The Cloud of Unknowing*) and the blessings we receive from the one we beseech.[15] It is certainly the case that Dionysius prefaces his discussion of the attributes of God – his goodness, his being, wisdom, life, and so on – in *Divine Names* 4–13, with a chapter on prayer, and also begins his treatise on *Mystical Theology* with a prayer to the Trinity beyond being: all of which lends support to Marion's otherwise rather extravagant etymology, but more immediately shows how deeply rooted in the tradition is Palamas's starting-point that speaking *to* God takes priority over, and indeed makes possible, speaking *about* God.

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[14] Palamas, *Ep. 1 to Barlaam* 41 (Gregory Palamas, *Syggrammata* I, ed. P.K. Christou [Thessaloniki, 1962], pp. 248–9).

Prayer then is the indispensable basis for genuine theology, and it was in these terms that Palamas defended the Athonite monks. Theology involves some learning, it involves an ability to think things through – the very fact that St John of Damascus's series of meditations on what we know about God and Christ, and what we need to know about the created order, which is what the *Orthodox Faith* amounts to, is prefaced by instruction on logic and definitions of philosophical terminology used in theology makes this clear – but what theology is concerned with is something known in prayer. Gregory's theological defence of the hesychasts not only justified their experience, but – perhaps in the long run just as important – prevented the kind of split between theology and spirituality that was already well advanced in the West in the fourteenth century. Gregory's life probably overlapped with that of the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who seems to regard the theology of the schools as religiously worthless, and opposes love and knowledge (in contrast to Theoleptos, who essays a very similar psychology to that of the author of *The Cloud* – a mind with a faculty for knowing and a faculty for loving – but sees them working together, rather than opposing them), saying famously, 'For whi he may wel be loued, bot not thought. By loue may he be getyn & holden; bot bi thought neither',[16] and at the end of *The Book of Privy Counsel* making explicit his contempt for learning:

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[15] Jean-Luc Marion, *L'Idole et la distance* (Paris, 1977), p. 199.

> for, as it is wel seide, a man kyndely desireth for to kunne [a quotation from Aristotle, no less!]; bot certes he may not taast of goostly felyng in god bot only by grace, haue he neuer so moche kunnyng of clergie ne of kynde. & therefore, I preie thee, seche more after felyng then after kunning; for kunnyng ofttymes disceynith with pride, bot meek louely felyng may not begile. Sciencia inflat, karitas edificat. In knowying is trauaile, in feling is rest.[17]

Palamas's insistence that the one known in prayer is the one to whom theological formulations refer – and vice versa – went some way to preventing that split, with all its damaging consequences.

I would like to end by reflecting on what seems to me a constant theme in St Gregory Palamas's theology, and one, indeed, that has perhaps not been nearly enough explored. I think I would put it as the way distinctions in Palamas serve to unite: union and distinction – *gnosis* and *diakrisis* – belong together; the purpose of distinction is to discover a more profound unity. (It is worth noting, in passing, that the same is said of the scholasticism of Aquinas: the title of one of the works by the great Catholic lay Thomist, Jacques Maritain, was *Distinguer pour unir* – 'Distinguish in order to unite'.) This seems to me to be true of the most famous distinction associated with the name of Palamas, the distinction, namely, between essence and energy. For the purpose of this distinction is not to divide, not to separate essence from energy; on the contrary, they are both God – to encounter God in his energies is not to encounter anything other than God or less than God, it is to encounter God himself, but the distinction enables such an affirmation without running the risk of asserting that the divine can be encompassed in human categories, for in his essence God remains unknowable. It preserves the mystery of God who makes himself known as unknowable: this is true even of the incarnation itself, for as Dionysius the Areopagite put it, God is

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[16] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, § 6 (ed. Phyllis Hodgson, *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counselling*, Oxford, 1944, p. 26).

[17] *The Book of Privy Counselling* (ed. Hodgson, pp. 171, l. 23 – 172, l. 3).

> hidden after the manifestation, or if I may speak more divinely, even in the manifestation itself. For this mystery of Jesus is hidden, and no word or concept can express what it is in itself, but what is said remains ineffable and what is understood unknown.[18]

Indeed, the language of union and distinction is perhaps more fundamental for Gregory than the distinction between essence and energy, and realization of this brings out how important the 'Divine Denys' is to Palamas: something that Fr Meyendorff was somewhat unwilling to admit, and indeed endeavoured to diminish. For when Palamas appeals to patristic tradition for support, just as important as the distinction made from St Basil the Great onwards between *ousia* and *energeia* was the second chapter of Dionysius's *Divine Names*, which treats of union and distinction.[19] In that chapter, Dionysius distinguishes between unions and distinctions both horizontally and vertically, so to speak. On the top level are unions that unite and unions that distinguish, and on the second level distinctions that unite and distinctions than distinguish. His explanation of all this is less than pellucid, but the only consistent way of interpreting it has the unions that unite referring to the names of God – goodness, being, life, wisdom, and so on – that refer to God in his unity, while the unions that distinguish refer to the persons of the Holy Trinity – the Father being unbegotten, the Son being begotten, and the Spirit proceeding; at the level of distinctions, the distinctions that distinguish refer to creation which derives from God, and is distinct from him, which leaves the distinctions that unite referring to what Palamas calls the energies of God – his ecstatic movement out of himself to encounter this creature in his goodness, being, life, wisdom, and so on. The purpose of all these elaborate distinctions – in Dionysius and in Palamas – is to affirm the unity of the Trinity in its hidden divine life, while at the same time affirming the reality of the creation as ontologically distinct from God-created, as opposed to uncreated – and yet able to encounter God himself without having its created status erased. This may sound complicated, but the complication is a consequence of our trying to stretch our concepts to gesture towards the ultimate reality of God that is prior to our concepts, and indeed altogether prior to our capacity even to come up with concepts. If this remains simply conceptual – simply a matter of our thinking – then it cannot but seem a rather ramshackle way of trying to articulate something of which we have no conception. But neither for Dionysius nor for Palamas is that true; for both of them these concepts are simply an attempt to find some response to our experience of God, an experience that remains ineffable. They are not for that reason unimportant: for if God is beyond our understanding, he is not beyond our misunderstanding, and concepts that express misunderstanding will not help us to enter more deeply into an experience of God. Dionysius attempts to meet this point by insisting that our concepts are really ways in which we try to call back into the experience of the divine presence among us: they are our shouts of praise, as we acknowledge God's love for us. Gregory affirms that, but also suggests – perhaps not always very explicitly – that what seems confusing and contradictory to our intellect may seem very different in experience. This theme runs like a thread through Fr Pavel Florensky's extraordinary book, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. Any dogma, he affirms, contains an antinomy – a contradiction, if you like. If it did not, it would not be a dogma of *faith*, it would be something rationally apprehensible; or more deeply, without antinomy, 'consciousness [...] is not full, not deep, has not looked into the inner heart of the object, for we cannot integrally think the essence of a religious object, do not have the power to embrace it rationally without decomposing it.' 'The task of an orthodox, universal rationality is to collect all the fragments, their fullness [...]: "You need many strings to play on the psaltery of Eternity".'[20] Florensky finds an illustration of this in the liturgy: 'The whole liturgy, especially the canons and stichera, is full of this ceaselessly exuberant wit of antithetic juxtapositions and antinomic affirmations.'[21] It would be interesting to reflect on the fact that St Gregory

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[18] Dionysius the Areopagite, *Ep.* 3.

[19] Some of the ideas in what follows I owe to my former pupil, Dr Mika Törönen, now at the monastery of St John the Baptist in Essex.

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[20] Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton, 1997), p. 119. The quotation is from the Russian symbolist poet, Andrey Bely.

[21] Ibid., p. 117.

Palamas and St John Koukouzeles were contemporaries on the Holy Mountain, and on the relationship between the hesychast prayer that Palamas championed and the highly elaborate forms of Byzantine chant associated especially with Koukouzeles. Florensky's remarks perhaps suggest a link between monastic *hesychia* and a form of monastic chant in which the sense of the words crumbles under the elaboration of the singing.

What remains antinomy, contradiction, concepts not properly formed at the level of concepts, may find resolution at the level of experience. Experience, therefore, is crucial, and equally important a continuing tradition of those who know such experience and can help others towards it. Florensky introduced another metaphor – that of beauty – suggesting that the truth of Orthodox dogma is glimpsed more as beauty, than as logically coherent exposition, for beauty – in visual art, music, poetry – is experienced as something where perceptions, contradictory in themselves, meet and are resolved in a unified vision or perception. Let me end, by quoting Florensky once again:

> Yes, there is a special beauty of the spirit, and, ungraspable by logical formulas, it is at the same time the only true path to the definition of what is orthodox and what is not orthodox. The connoisseurs of this beauty are the spiritual elders, the *startsy*, the masters of the 'art of arts', as the holy fathers call asceticism. The *startsy* were adept at assessing the quality of spiritual life. The Orthodox taste, the Orthodox temper, is felt but it is not subject to arithmetical calculation. Orthodoxy is shown, not proved. That is why there is only one way to understand Orthodoxy: through direct Orthodox experience […] [T]o become Orthodox, it is necessary to immerse oneself all at once in the very element of Orthodoxy, to begin living in an Orthodox way. There is no other way.[22]

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[22] Ibid., p. 9.

Further Reading

Editions

Gregoriou tou Palama, *Syggrammata*, edited by Panagiotos Christou, 5 vols. so far (Thessaloniki, 1962–).

Grégoire Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, edited with introduction and notes by J. Meyendorff, 2nd revised edn. (Louvain, 1973).

St Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, edited and translated by Robert E. Sinkewicz CSB (Studies and Texts 83, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1988).

English Translations

Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, translated by Nicholas Gendle, introduction by John Meyendorff (London, 1983).

The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas, translated by Christopher Veniamin, vols. 1–2 (out of a projected three) (South Canaan, PA, 2002–4).

Literature

G.C. and V. Conticello (eds), *La Théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. 2 (Turnhout, 2002), chapter on Gregory Palamas by Robert E. Sinkewicz, pp. 131–88 [contains excellent bibliography on St Gregory Palamas].

S. Giagkazoglou, *Koinonia Theoseos. He Synthese Christologias kai Pneumatologias sto Ergo tou Hagiou Gregoriou tou Palama* (Athens, 2001).

H. Gunnarsson, *Mystical Realism in the Early Theology of Gregory Palamas* (Göteborg, 2002).

J. Lison, *L'Esprit répandu. La pneumatologie de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1994).

J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris, 1959); Eng. tr., Faith Press, London, 1964, now published by St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY.

A. Radović, *To Mysterion tes Hagias Triados kata ton Hagion Gregorion Palaman*, Analecta Vlatadon 16 (Thessaloniki, 1991).

KALLISTOS WARE

St Nikodimos and the *Philokalia*

Black Tunnels and Sudden Viewpoints

Journeying by rail along the Italian Riviera, the traveller experiences in rapid succession periods of total darkness, followed by moments of blinding light. The train plunges into one tunnel after another, erupting at brief intervals into the sunshine. For an instant we see below us pines and palm trees, a golden beach and the sparkling sun, before we are once more swallowed up by the next tunnel. When we emerge again into the daylight, there flashes before us a new scene with different trees and another beach. Our journey is an alternation of darkness and light, of black tunnel and sudden viewpoint.[1]

Something similar, although in a less dramatic manner, occurs in the history of Athonite spirituality: moments of light are followed by periods of obscurity. A first such moment of light comes in the tenth century, with the foundation of the Great Lavra by St Athanasios the Athonite in 963–4. There is reasonably detailed evidence about the ascetic career of Athanasios and his personal understanding of the monastic life.[2] In comparison, far less can be said with any confidence about the situation on the Holy Mountain in the century prior to Athanasios. St Peter the Athonite (died before 883) remains a shadowy figure; concerning his contemporary St Evthymios the Younger, who arrived on the Mountain in 859, a few facts are available, but they do not amount to much. Likewise, all too little is known about what was happening elsewhere on the Mountain during Athanasios's lifetime.[3]

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[1] A friend of mine, as the train stopped at Rapallo – perhaps the most beautiful point on the whole of the Riviera coast – was surprised to see a placard put up by British Rail: COME TO HERNE BAY.

[2] See K. Ware, 'St Athanasios the Athonite: Traditionalist or Innovator?' in A. Bryer and M. Cunningham (eds), *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, Papers from the Twenty-Eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March, 1994 (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 3–16.

The years that follow the foundation of the Great Lavra are not, it is true, a period of total darkness, but the surviving sources shed little light upon the inner experience of the monks. There is evidence about the founders of the main monasteries, the dates of foundation, and the constitutional evolution of the monastic republic as reflected in the imperial *typika*. It is also possible to reconstruct the daily pattern of liturgical prayer. But the personal spirituality of the early Athonites – how they prayed in the solitude of their cells, what was their experience of mystical union – remains for the most part hidden from us. In the case of fourth-century Egypt, there are contemporary or near-contemporary texts such as the *Lives* of St Pachomios, the *Lausiac History* of Palladios, and the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, which provide a detailed picture of the spiritual life of the monks. But such evidence is largely lacking during the early centuries of Athonite monasticism.

A second decisive moment of light in the history of the Holy Mountain occurs in the middle of the fourteenth century, at the time of the hesychast controversy. From the writings of St Gregory of Sinai (d. 1346) and St Gregory Palamas (*c.*1296–1359), from the testimony of their immediate disciples such as St Kallistos I and St Philotheos Kokkinos, Patriarchs of Constantinople – and also from the two lives of St Maximos of Kafsokalyvia (d.*c.*1365), although here some caution is needed[4] – we gain a vivid insight into the way in which Athonite monks in this period practised 'noetic prayer' (*noera prosevchi*), especially the Jesus Prayer, and how they understood the vision of the Divine and Uncreated Light.

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[3] The scattered evidence is summarized by R. Morris, 'The Origins of Athos', in Bryer and Cunningham, pp. 37–46.

[4] See K. Ware, 'St. Maximos of Kapsokalyvia and Fourteenth-Century Athonite Hesychasm', in J. Chrysostomides (ed.), *ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΡΙΑ. Essays presented to Joan Hussey for her 80th Birthday* (Camberley, 1988), pp. 409–30.

Then once again we are plunged into a tunnel from the fifteenth to the early eighteenth century. Occasional figures stand out in those four hundred years, such as Agapios Landos (d.*c.*1670), hermit of Little St Anne and author of the highly popular manual *The Salvation of Sinners*, or St Akakios the Younger (d. 1730), founder of the skete of Kafsokalyvia. But on the whole the story of Athonite spirituality during these centuries is veiled in silence. Doubtless the tradition of hesychast prayer continued uninterrupted, perhaps in the sketes and kellia rather than in the main monasteries, but it flows like a subterranean stream.

In the mid-eighteenth century, however, we re-emerge from the tunnel. This, the era of the hesychast renaissance, is a third decisive moment of light. There is plentiful evidence, much of it first-hand, concerning the Slav monk St Paisy Velichkovsky (1722–94), who was on Mount Athos from 1746 until 1763, when he left with most of his disciples for Moldavia (north-east Romania). The Kollyvades controversy, which broke out on the Holy Mountain in the 1750s, is also fully documented. In particular, we are well informed about the two leading spokesmen for the Kollyvades party, St Makarios Notaras (1731–1805), formerly Archbishop of Corinth – a visitor to the Mountain, although not himself an Athonite – and his friend and collaborator St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (1749–1809).[5] The main work edited by the two of them, the *Philokalia*, first published in 1782, expresses more effectively than any other single volume the quintessence of Athonite spirituality. A vast collection of ascetic and mystical texts by thirty-six different authors, extending from the fourth to the fifteenth century, this is arguably the most significant Greek Orthodox book to appear during the whole of the four centuries of the Tourkokratia.[6]

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[5] For a brief but sound account of Nikodimos in English, see the book by C. Cavarnos, *St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite*, Modern Orthodox Saints 3 (Belmont, 1974); compare, by the same author, *St. Makarios of Corinth*, Modern Orthodox Saints 2 (Belmont, 1972). There is as yet no full, critical biography of Nikodimos. For the existing bibliography, see D. Stiernon, 'Nicodème l'Hagiorite', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 11 (1981), cols. 234–50; I. [=E.] Citterio, *L'orientamento ascetico-spirituale di Nicodemo Aghiorita* (Alessandria, 1987), pp. 7–21 (this book is the best study of Nikodimos known to me); and E. Citterio, 'Nicodemo Agiorita', in C. G. Conticello and V. Conticello (eds), *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition* 2 (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 905–78 (especially pp. 973–8). Valuable material can be found in A. Rigo (ed.), *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, Atti dell' VIII Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa, sessione bizantina, Bose, 16–19 settembre 2000 (Magnano, 2001). The recent monograph by G. E. Marnellos, *Saint Nicodème l'Hagiorite (1749–1809), maître et pédagogue de la nation grecque*, Ana-

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lecta Vlatadon 64 (Thessaloniki, 2002), came to my attention too late to be used in the preparation of the present paper.

[6] On the Greek editions and foreign translations of the *Philokalia*, see K. Ware, 'Philocalie', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 12 (1984), cols. 1336–52. For supplementary information on the Slav and Romanian versions, see Dan Zamfirescu, *A Fundamental Book of the European Culture* (Bucharest, 1991), pp. 8–22; V. Pelin, 'L'opera di Nicodemo l'Aghiorita in Romania', in Rigo, *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, pp. 243–51; Citterio, 'Nicodemo Agiorita', pp. 919–21. A detailed analysis of the contents of the *Philokalia* is provided by V. Conticello and E. Citterio, 'La Philocalie et ses versions', in C. G. and V. Conticello, *La théologie byzantine* 2, pp. 999–1021.

The most accessible Greek edition of the *Philokalia* is the third, issued in 5 vols. (Athens, 1957–63). There are two English versions. The first, in 2 vols., is by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London, 1951); *Early Fathers from the Philokalia* (London, 1954). This is based on the Russian *Dobrotolubiye* edited by St Theophan the Recluse (1815–94), and it contains only selected texts. (The word *Dobrotolubiye* is the Slavonic and Russian equivalent to the Greek word *Philokalia.*) The second English version, based on the original Greek, contains all the texts included in the edition of 1782 (together with certain supplementary material from the second Greek edition): *The Philokalia: The Complete Text ... translated from the Greek*, by G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard and K. Ware, 4 vols. (London/Boston, 1979–95); vol. 5 is in preparation. References to the *Philokalia* in this article are to the third Greek edition, followed (where applicable) by a reference to the English translation (ET) of Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, or else to the earlier ET of Kadloubovsky and Palmer.

On the theology of the *Philokalia*, see P. Sherrard, 'The Revival of Hesychast Spirituality', in L. Dupré and D. E. Saliers (eds), *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest 18 (New York, 1989), pp. 417–31; revised version, 'The Renewal of the Tradition of Contemplative Spirituality', in P. Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition* (Edinburgh/Brookline, 1998), pp. 245–67. See also three articles by K. Ware: 'The Spirituality of the Philokalia', *Sobornost incorporating Eastern Churches Review*, 13:1 (1991), 6–24;

As we view the total sweep of Athonite history from the ninth to the nineteenth century, it has to be admitted that there are more dark tunnels than sudden viewpoints. The truth is that, not on Athos only but in every place and every age, the real life of the human community is largely unknown to us. A notable illustration of this fact is provided in the correspondence of St Barsanouphios of Gaza (early sixth century), one of the many patristic texts edited by Nikodimos. In a letter to his fellow monks, the 'Great Old Man', as Barsanouphios was known, remarks in passing:

> There are three men perfect in the sight of God, who have surpassed the measure of humanity and received the power to loose and to bind, to remit sins and to retain them (Matt.18:18; John 20:23). They stand firm in the breach (Ps.105 [106]:23), so that the world is not totally destroyed in a single moment, and because of their prayers God chastises us with mercy [...] they are John in Rome, and Elias in Corinth, and a third in the province of Jerusalem.[7]

The 'Great Old Man' does not specify who this third person may be, presumably because it is none other than he himself. As for the other two, little or nothing seems to be known about them apart from their names. Yet, if indeed it was their intercessions that preserved the inhabited earth from destruction in the early years of the sixth century, then *sub specie aeternitatis* they were the most influential persons in their generation, far more so than any emperor, politician, or patriarch. The genuine story of the human race is altogether different from the account contained in history books.

'Possiamo parlare di spiritualità della Filocalia?', in O. Raquez (ed.), *Amore del bello: Studi sulla Filocalia*, Atti del 'Simposio Internazionale sulla Filocalia', Pontificio Collegio Greco, Roma, novembre 1989 (Magnano, 1991), pp. 27–52; 'Gerald Palmer, the *Philokalia*, and the Holy Mountain', in G. Speake (ed.), *Friends of Mount Athos: Annual Report 1994* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 23–9.

[7] *Letter* 569: ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis-Noah, *Sources chrétiennes* 451 (Paris, 2001), 732–4. Nikodimos's edition of the correspondence of Barsanouphios and John of Gaza was published posthumously at Venice in 1816, and reissued with minor corrections by S. Schoinas at Volos in 1960. It has now been superseded by the five-volume critical edition of Neyt and de Angelis-Noah.
For the belief that there are men and women of hidden holiness whose prayers protect the universe, compare the stories about the *zaddikim* in Hasidic Judaism and about the *abdâl* in Islam.

Certainly this is the case with the story of the Holy Mountain. What little we know about the inner joys and sorrows of the Athonite saints is mostly due to the fortunate chance – as we might suppose it to be – that some of them happened to have literate disciples who recorded their lives and teaching. (Of course what we call 'chance' is in reality nothing of the kind; on the spiritual level, there is no such thing as mere coincidence.) How much, for example, would we know about St Silouan the Athonite (1898–1938), were it not for the writings of his disciple Archimandrite Sophrony? How much would we know about Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1898–1959), were it not for the publications of his spiritual children? At the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon during Silouan's day, and in the Athonite 'desert' during the time of Joseph, were there not many other monks of deep holiness, who for want of a chronicler are now totally forgotten? The events recounted in the written annals of the Holy Mountain are no more than the tip of the iceberg. When exploring Athonite spirituality, we are like children gathering sea shells on the margin of an uncharted ocean.

'A Word Coming forth from Silence': The Kollyvades and the Hesychast Renaissance

What was the broader cultural and religious context, on Athos and elsewhere, in which the eighteenth-century hesychast renaissance developed and the *Philokalia* saw the light of day?

Despite the fall of Constantinople in 1453, throughout the sixteenth century the Holy Mountain managed to preserve what Graham Speake terms 'a façade of prosperity'.[8] The following century, however, was an epoch of decline. Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta refers to the 'poverty and financial distress' on Athos at this time, and to its

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[8] G. Speake, *Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise* (New Haven/London, 2002), p. 133.

'intellectual torpor'.[9] The monks found difficulty in paying the ever-increasing taxes imposed by the Ottoman authorities, and many of the monasteries became virtually deserted. Libraries were neglected, and manuscripts sold off to foreign visitors. Under such adverse external conditions, the tradition of hesychast prayer was driven underground, surviving mostly in secret.

Not only on the Holy Mountain but throughout the Greek community at large, there was in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries a prevailing demoralization. Particularly in rural areas, there existed a danger of mass apostasy to Islam. To combat this, in the generation immediately preceding Nikodimos, St Kosmas the Aetolian (1714–79), monk of Philotheou, set out from Athos on a series of remarkably fruitful missionary journeys, preaching throughout the Greek mainland, the Dodecanese, and the Ionian Islands, before eventually meeting a martyr's death at the hands of the Turks. In his eyes the defence of the faith was inseparable from educational work, and in the course of twenty years he founded more than two hundred schools.[10]

The success of Kosmas coincided with a more general renewal. By the second half of the eighteenth century the situation of *Romiosyni* had significantly improved, both economically and educationally, and Athos shared in this recovery. Not only did the material position of the monasteries grow easier, but there was also what de Mendieta rightly describes as a 'literary and religious revival'.[11] In this revival no one on the Holy Mountain played a more decisive role than Nikodimos. He too was a missionary, albeit in a different manner from Kosmas: he carried out his evangelism not as an itinerant preacher but through the printed word.

The era in which Nikodimos lived and worked, the later part of the eighteenth century, constitutes a crucial turning-point in the spiritual evolution of the Greek people. Notwithstanding the collapse of the Greek empire, in many respects the Byzantine period of Orthodox history – more exactly, the Romaic period – extended uninterrupted down to the late eighteenth century. The Church continued to play a central part in all aspects of national life. In the realm of theology, despite heavy Western influence, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, a patristic perspective was not altogether lost. Seventeenth-century authors such as Gabriel Severus, Meletios Syrigos, and Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem used the terminology of Latin Scholasticism, but their primary point of reference was still the Ecumenical Councils and the Fathers. When looking back to the past, most Greeks took as their ideal not classical Athens but the Orthodox empire of New Rome.

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[9] E. Amand de Mendieta, *Mount Athos: The Garden of the Panaghia*, Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten 41 (Berlin/Amsterdam, 1972), pp. 113, 115.

[10] For accounts of Kosmas in English, consult C. Cavarnos, 'St. Cosmas Aitolos', *Modern Orthodox Saints* 1 (Belmont, 1971); N. M. Vaporis, *Father Kosmas, the Apostle of the Poor. The Life of St. Kosmas Aitolos together with an English Translation of his Teaching and Letters* (Brookline, 1977).

[11] de Mendieta, *Mount Athos*, p. 116.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, however, there was a shift of emphasis. A different *Zeitgeist* began to prevail among educated Greeks: the spirit of modern Hellenism. The new outlook was not explicitly anti-religious, at any rate initially, but in the Neohellenic world-view the Church no longer occupied the central position that it had possessed hitherto. A more secular mind-set emerged. Church teachings and practices, hitherto accepted largely without question, began to be subjected to critical scrutiny. The protagonists of Neohellenism looked back beyond the Byzantine period to ancient Greece, drawing their inspiration from the Parthenon rather than Hagia Sophia, from Plato and Aristotle rather than St Gregory the Theologian or St Maximos the Confessor. They shared the Western European admiration for the Athens of Pericles, and they shared equally the Western disdain for Byzantine civilization. They looked for guidance to the Enlightenment, to Voltaire, the French Encyclopaedists, and other such representatives of the *siècle des lumières.* An appreciable number embraced Freemasonry. Many of them welcomed the French Revolution as the dawn of a fresh era of freedom, and took this as their model in preparing for the liberation of the Greek nation from Ottoman autocracy.

It is not to be supposed, however, that there was an abrupt transition at the end of the eighteenth century, with the Romaic era coming to a sudden end and being everywhere replaced by the ideology of Neohellenism. The reality is far more complex. In modern Greece during the past two hundred years the two approaches have continued to coexist and overlap, and there is a subtle and pervasive interaction between them. Alexander Solzhenitsyn remarked in *The Gulag Archipelago* that the line of demarcation separating good and evil runs, not between nations or classes or political parties, but right through the middle of every human heart; and this line constantly shifts and oscillates.[12] By the same token it can be argued that the line of demarcation between the *Romios* and the Hellene runs right through the heart of every modern Greek, and this line too is constantly shifting and oscillating.

Forty years ago Patrick Leigh Fermor offered a witty delineation of what he styled 'the Helleno-Romaic Dilemma', and most of what he says is still true today. As he rightly observed concerning the two outlooks: 'All Greeks, according to my theory, are an amalgam, in varying degrees, of both; they contradict and complete each other.'[13] If at the end of the eighteenth century the outstanding spokesman for modern Hellenism was Adamantios Korais (1748–1833), then during the same epoch the leading exponent of the Romaic or traditional Orthodox spirit was Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain, born just one year after Korais.

On the Holy Mountain the first direct confrontation between the older outlook and the new came as a result of the foundation of the Athonian Academy in 1748–9.[14] In 1753 the direction of the school was entrusted to the eminent teacher and writer Evgenios Voulgaris (1716–1806), at that time a deacon (he was later consecrated bishop in Russia).[15] He saw himself as a loyal servant of the Church, but he was also a disciple of the Western Enlightenment, introducing into his lectures on philosophy the ideas of Descartes, Leibniz, and Locke. Initially the school was warmly welcomed, attracting crowds of enthusiastic students. 'Here was something greater than the Academy and the Lyceum', exclaimed the Constantinopolitan Sergios Makraios (*c.*1734/40–1819), '[...] a place of learning such as the Greeks in their misfortune had not seen before.'[16] Opposition to the Athonias, however, quickly emerged in conservative circles alike on the Mountain and beyond its borders, and this led Voulgaris to resign in 1759, and to leave Athos. The school itself came to an end two years afterwards; later attempts to revive it proved short-lived. Its ruins, prominent on a hill above Vatopedi, remain as a sombre warning to subsequent Athonite educationalists.

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[12] *The Gulag Archipelago*, part iv, chapter 1: Fontana edition, 2 (Glasgow, 1976), p. 597.

[13] P. Leigh Fermor, *Roumeli: Travels in Northern Greece* (London, 1966), p. 106. On the effects of Neohellenism upon Greek Orthodoxy, see the severe but shrewd assessment by P. Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West. A Study in the Christian Tradition* (London, 1959), pp. 165–95.

[14] See de Mendieta, *The Holy Mountain*, pp. 117–21; Speake, *Mount Athos*, pp. 136–8.

[15] In English, see S. K. Batalden, *Catherine II's Greek Prelate: Eugenios Voulgaris in Russia, 1771–1806*, Eastern European Monographs 115 (Boulder/New

A more prolonged and far-reaching confrontation between traditional Orthodoxy and the *Aufklärung* came about as a result of the Kollyvades controversy.[17] In this both Nikodimos and Makarios Notaras were closely involved. So far as the explicit topics of the controversy are concerned, it was not a conflict between Romaic conservatism and Neohellenic innovation, but a much more restricted debate concerning liturgical practices and sacramental observance. Underlying the whole dispute, however, was the deep suspicion felt by the strongly traditionalist Kollyvades towards the Western Enlightenment and all that its influence represented in the educated Greek world.

York, 1982); further bibliography in D. Stiernon, 'Eugène Boulgaris', in C. G. and V. Conticello, *La théologie byzantine* 2, pp. 721–837.

[16] Makraios, 'Ypomnimata', in K. N. Stathas, *Mesaioniki Vivliothiki* 3 (Venice, 1872), p. 219.

[17] On the movement of the Kollyvades, see the well-informed but somewhat hostile account by Ch. S. Tzogas, *I peri ton mnimosynon eris en Agio Orei kata ton 18 aiona* (Thessaloniki, 1969). A briefer but more sympathetic treatment is provided by K. K. Papoulidis, *To kinima ton Kollyvadon* (Athens, 1971). Further bibliography can be found in G. Podskalsky, *Griechische Theologie in der Zeit der Türkenherrschaft (1453–1821)* (München, 1988), pp. 329–85, and in E. Morini, 'Il Movimento dei "Kollyvadhes". Rilettura dei contesti più significativi in ordine alla rinascità spirituale Greco-Ortodossa dei secoli xviii–xix', in O. Raquez (ed.), *Amore del bello: Studi sulla Filocalia*, op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 137–77.

The name 'Kollyvades' is derived from *kollyva*, the boiled wheat used at memorial services for the departed (*mnimosyna*). It was over the celebration of these memorial services that the dispute initially arose. In 1754 the monks of the skete of St Anne began to build a new central church (*kyriakon*). To enhance their fundraising, they undertook in the customary way to commemorate the names of the departed relatives of donors. According to the Orthodox *typikon*, the appointed day for *mnimosyna* is Saturday, the day on which the dead Christ rested in the tomb. But many monks at St Anne's needed to work on Saturdays, and in particular a number of them had to go to Karyes on that day to sell their wares at the weekly market. As the number of names to be commemorated increased, for convenience they began to transfer the *mnimosyna* to Sunday. This, the day of the Saviour's resurrection from the dead, seemed to them an equally appropriate occasion on which to intercede for the departed who are awaiting their own resurrection.

This innovation displeased the more conservative monks at St Anne's and elsewhere on the Mountain. Under the leadership initially of the deacon Neophytos the Peloponnesian (1713–84), a monk at the nearby skete of Kafsokalyvia, the traditionalist party insisted that memorial services should continue to be celebrated on Saturday, as in the past; hence the sobriquet 'Kollyvades', assigned to them by their opponents. It is tempting to dismiss the whole dispute as nothing more than a fracas about a technical point of church ritual, but in the view of the Kollyvades a far more profound issue of principle was at stake: loyalty to Holy Tradition.

The Kollyvades were concerned, however, not merely with the correct day for *mnimosyna* but with other questions of more obvious importance. In particular they advocated frequent communion – 'continual communion', as they termed it – by which they meant the daily reception of the sacrament, if at all possible. This was a highly unusual standpoint in the Orthodox Church at this time. Almost everywhere in Eastern Christendom communion had become infrequent: lay persons usually communicated three or four times a year, and in many cases only at Pascha, while most non-ordained monks on Athos received the sacrament no more than once in every forty days.[18] The advocacy of frequent communion by the Kollyvades proved highly controversial, bringing upon them obloquy and persecution; and many of them fled or were expelled from Athos. Nikodimos was a firm supporter of frequent communion and wrote in its defence, but was not himself exiled from the Mountain.

In addition to their championship of correct liturgical and sacramental practice, the Kollyvades were also deeply devoted to the hesychast tradition of inner prayer, as taught by such fourteenth-century Athonites as Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palamas, and they upheld the Palamite doctrine concerning the vision of the Light of Tabor. More broadly they sought to promote a far-reaching patristic *ressourcement*, editing and publishing numerous writings of the Fathers; in this ambitious programme a central and decisive place was occupied by the *Philokalia*. Here, in the patristic and Byzantine texts that they disseminated, the Kollyvades believed that they could find a 'word coming forth from silence',[19] which might serve as an antidote to the growing secularism within Greek society.

The Kollyvades looked upon this patristic heritage, not as an archaeological survival from the distant past, but as a living guide for contemporary Christians. In editing the Fathers they had a practical purpose in view. It was their hope that the *Philokalia* and other such publications would not simply gather dust on the bookshelves of scholarly specialists, but would be read by the laity as well as by monastics and clergy. As the two editors state on the title-page of the *Philokalia*, the book is intended 'for the general benefit of the Orthodox'. In his introduction Nikodimos maintains that St Paul's injunction, 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17), is addressed not merely to hermits in caves and on mountain-tops but to married Christians with responsibilities for a family, to farmers, merchants, and lawyers, even to 'kings and courtiers living in palaces'.[20] Unceasing prayer of the heart is a universal vocation. The best is for everyone.

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[18] On frequency of communion in the Christian East, see E. Herman, 'Die häufige und tägliche Kommunion in den byzantinischen Klöstern', in *Mémorial Louis Petit*, Archives de l'Orient chrétien 1 (Bucharest, 1948), pp. 203–17; R. Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Washington, DC, 1984), pp. 61–80; K. Ware, 'Prayer and the Sacraments in the *Synagoge*', in M. Mullett and A. Kirby (eds), *The Theotokos Evergetis and Eleventh-Century Monasticism*, Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations 6:1 (Belfast, 1994), pp. 325–47, especially pp. 336–41.

[19] The phrase is used originally by St Ignatios of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 8.2, where it refers to the person of Christ.

Through this patristic *ressourcement*, then, the Kollyvades sought to counteract the new-fangled spirit of the *Aufklärung*. The regeneration of the Greek nation, they were fervently convinced, could come about only through a return to the authentic sources of Orthodox Christianity. Emulating Laocoön as he stood before the Trojan horse, they cried out: 'timeo Francos et dona ferentes.'[21] They feared the Franks with their 'enlightened' gifts. 'Do not trust the West', they said to their contemporaries; 'these ill-digested notions will prove in the end nothing but a disappointment and a deceit. Our only hope is to rediscover our true roots in the Divine Liturgy, in patristic theology, and in hesychastic prayer.'

Such, specifically, was the standpoint of Nikodimos. Writing with reference to Roman Catholic proselytism, he stated in his great collection of the Holy Canons entitled *Pedalion* ('Rudder'), 'Divine Providence has set a guardian over us.'[22] The 'guardian' that he had in view was none other than the Ottoman empire. His remark can be given a wider application. The Ottoman power constituted, for the Orthodox Christian faithful, a God-appointed protector not only against the emissaries of the Bishop of Rome but equally against the corruptive influences of the Enlightenment. Many traditionalist Orthodox, so far from supporting schemes to rebel against the Turks with the help of Western Europe, felt that they were better off as they were. Despite Turkish oppression, despite the dangers of apostasy and the sufferings of the New Martyrs – to whom Nikodimos had himself devoted a pioneering study[23] – the relative isolation in which the Rayahs existed under Turkish rule could be seen as a blessing. It safeguarded the Greek community from the infiltration of alien ideas, helping it to preserve intact its Orthodox identity.

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[20] *Philokalia* 1, xxii. The introduction by Nikodimos is not included in the ET by Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware.

[21] Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2.48.

[22] Hieromonk Agapios and Monk Nikodimos, *Pedalion ...itoi apantes oi ieroi, kai theioi kanones* [*Rudder ... or all the holy and divine Canons*] (Leipzig, 1800), p. 36; ET by D. Cummings, *The Rudder* (Chicago, 1957), p. 73.

As regards the immediate outcome of the controversy, the Kollyvades were only partly successful. Contrary to what the traditionalist monks of Athos had maintained concerning *mnimosyna*, in the decrees issued by the Ecumenical Patriarch Sophronios II in 1776,[24] and by the Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory V in 1819,[25] it was laid down that memorial services may be celebrated not only on Saturday but on Sunday, and indeed on any day of the week. Yet, on the far more important issue of the frequency of communion, Gregory V in his 1819 decree ruled basically in favour of the Kollyvades. Frequency of communion, he stated, is not to be restricted by any fixed interval of time, such as forty days, but in principle the faithful – provided that they are properly prepared, and have made their confession to their spiritual father and been given his blessing to communicate – may receive the sacrament at each and every celebration of the Eucharist; for at each and every celebration they are invited so to do with the words, 'With fear of God, with faith and love, draw near.'

Unfortunately, despite the strenuous efforts of the Kollyvades, infrequent communion remained the norm almost everywhere in the Orthodox Church during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were scattered supporters of a more frequent reception of the sacrament, such as the widely revered St John of Kronstadt (1829–1908) in pre-revolutionary Russia, and the members of the *Zoe* movement in Greece, founded by Fr Evsevios Matthopoulos in 1907. But it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that communion on a weekly basis, or at any rate on most Sundays, became at all wide-spread in monasteries and parishes. It is still very far from being universal in contemporary Orthodox practice.

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[23] *Neon Martyrologion* [*New Martyrology*] (Venice, 1799). For large portions of this in ET, see L. J. Papadopoulos and G. Lizardos (eds), *New Martyrs of the Turkish Yoke* (Seattle, 1985). Cf. N. M. Vaporis, *Witnesses for Christ. Orthodox Christian Neomartyrs of the Ottoman Period 1437–1860* (Crestwood, 2000).

[24] In Ph. Meyer, *Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster* (Leipzig, 1894), pp. 236–41, especially pp. 239–40.

[25] In J. D. Mansi and L. Petit, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* 40 (Paris, 1909), pp. 81–2.

When I first visited the Holy Mountain in 1961, it continued to be the normal rule for non-ordained monks to receive the sacrament only once in every forty days. The only notable exception was the monastery of Dionysiou where, under the influence of the great Elder Gabriel (1886–1983), abbot for nearly half a century, the monks went for communion once in every two weeks, on Saturday (never on Sunday). I recall my astonishment when on that first visit I attended the all-night vigil for the feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos (8/21 September) at the Great Lavra. There was a congregation of more than a hundred, both monks and lay pilgrims. About ten priests and several deacons officiated at Vespers and Matins. But, when the time for the Divine Liturgy arrived, this was celebrated by a single priest, without a deacon; and at the moment for communion, out of the entire congregation not a single person came forward to receive the sacrament. Today, I am happy to say, the situation has changed, and at many monasteries on the Holy Mountain it is normal for the monks to receive communion several times a week. This must certainly bring great joy to the heart of Nikodimos.

'An Encyclopaedia of Athonite Learning': The Work of St Nikodimos

The most prolific author among the Kollyvades, co-editor of the *Philokalia,* St Nikodimos has been justly described as 'an encyclopaedia of the Athonite learning of his time'.[26] He was born in 1749 on the Greek island of Naxos, and at the age of sixteen went to Smyrna, where he studied for five years (1765–70) at the Evangelical School, one of the leading Greek Orthodox educational centres in this period. He proved to be an intelligent and exceptionally industrious pupil.

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[26] M. Gedeon, *O Athos: Anamniseis – Engrapha – Simeioseis* (Constantinople, 1885), p. 216.

Moreover, he was gifted with a photographic memory, which greatly assisted him when, in later years on Athos, he had to compose many of his works without easy access to a library. It is recounted that on one occasion, when he was attending Vespers on Holy Saturday in an Athonite hermitage, it was found that they had no book with the fifteen Old Testament readings appointed for the service. Unperturbed Nikodimos proceeded to recite them all by heart.

Returning to Naxos in 1770, Nikodimos became secretary to the local bishop. At this stage, it seemed probable that he would pursue the normal career open to a young Greek with scholarly gifts and ecclesiastical interests; he might, that is to say, have chosen to continue his education in the West at a Roman Catholic or Protestant university and then, returning to the Levant, he might have taken up a professorship at some 'School of the Nation', eventually becoming a bishop. Instead of this, contacts on Naxos with three Kollyvades monks, exiles from the Holy Mountain, turned his thoughts in a different direction. Eager to learn more about the Kollyvades movement, he travelled to Hydra to see Makarios of Corinth, and this encounter had a decisive effect on his future life. Also on Hydra he came to know the Elder Silvester, another of the Kollyvades who had been forced to leave Athos. Probably it was Silvester who initiated Nikodimos into the practice of inner prayer.

These meetings awakened in the young Nikodimos a longing for monastic seclusion and hesychastic prayer. In 1775 he made his way to the Holy Mountain and here, apart from a few outside journeys, he remained for the rest of his life. He was tonsured as a monk at Dionysiou, but was never ordained deacon or priest. On Athos, and throughout the Christian East in general, monasticism has always remained predominantly a lay movement. Ordination is seen, not primarily as a matter of subjective 'vocation', but in functional terms; in most places, only as many monks are made priest as are strictly necessary for the celebration of the services. The fact that a monk is well educated is not in itself a reason for him to receive ordination. Thus the situation of Nikodimos as a learned lay monk was and is by no means unusual in Athonite practice.

Nikodimos did not remain long at Dionysiou. In fact, almost all his time on Athos was spent not in one of the main monasteries but in various kellia or small hermitages. In this he resembled the Athonite hesychasts of the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, such as St Nikephoros, St Gregory of Sinai, St Gregory Palamas (save for relatively brief periods), and St Maximos of Kafsokalyvia. While hesychast contemplation is certainly possible in large coenobia, on the whole it has flourished in the remote sketes and isolated hermit cells of the Holy Mountain.

'He repeatedly changed his place of residence', observes Fr Gerasimos of Little St Anne in the *vita* that he prepared for the feast of St Nikodimos.[27] Does this betoken a certain restlessness and lack of stability in the saint's character? I think not; it is to be seen rather as an indication of his kenotic poverty, and of his desire to keep himself totally free for the work of writing and editing. For seven years, it is true, he lived with one companion in an isolated hermitage that he had leased, the *kalyva* of Theonas, not far from the monastery of Pantokrator; otherwise he had no permanent home of his own, but preferred to be a guest in kellia belonging to other monks. He never sought to gather round him a group of disciples, as had been done on Athos some twenty-five years earlier by the translator of the Slavonic *Philokalia*, St Paisy Velichkovsky. By contrast Nikodimos had no pastoral or administrative position, no fixed base, no personal library, no circle of amanuenses and assistants. He worked alone.

In this way Nikodimos chose to reduce his existence to the barest possible essentials, depending on the hospitality of his monastic friends and on the books that he could borrow from others. He always wore sandals, never shoes, and he had no more than a single cassock. In the words of Fr Gerasimos, 'He was simple in his manners, forbearing, sweet and benign in character, devoid of possessions, meek and humble.'[28] Truly he was one of the 'strangers and pilgrims of this earth' (Heb. 11:13).

Nikodimos's career as an editor began two years after his arrival on the Mountain, when in 1777 Makarios of Corinth visited Athos and renewed the friendship that he and Nikodimos had begun in Hydra. According to the biographer and personal friend of Nikodimos, Hieromonk Evthymios, Makarios brought with him in manuscript form three works that he entrusted to Nikodimos for revision:

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[27] In Cavarnos, *St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite*, p. 89.

[28] Ibid., p. 93.

> In the year 1777 the Saint [i.e. Bishop] of Corinth Makarios arrived [on Athos], and after going on pilgrimage to the holy monasteries he came to Karyes and was given hospitality in the kellion of St Antony by one of his fellow countrymen, Elder David. While staying there, he summoned Nikodimos and asked him to revise the *Philokalia.* In this way the blessed one embarked on the task. We may well ask: embarked on what task? I am at a loss and know not what to say or how to describe the spiritual struggles and excessive labours of his intellect and flesh. My mind lacks power even to guess at all that. He embarked, I say, on the *Philokalia*, and we have before us the beautiful preface that he wrote, and the brief lives, sweet as honey, of the blessed fathers. He likewise corrected the *Evergetinos* and adorned it with a fine preface. He corrected and expanded the short, all-golden work *On the Divine and Holy Continual Communion.* These the Saint of Corinth received from Nikodimos, and he went to Smyrna to raise money for the costs of printing.[29]

In due course all three works were published at Venice: the *Philokalia* in 1782; the vast ascetic anthology known as *Evergetinos*, compiled by Paul of Evergetis (d.1054), in 1783; and the tract entitled *On Continual Communion*, also in 1783.[30]

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[29] Evthymios, *Life of Nikodimos*, ed. S. Lavriotis, in the periodical *Grigorios o Palamas*, 4 (1920), 636–41; 5 (1921), 210–18; see p. 640. A revised edition of this was edited by N. Bilalis, *O prototypos vios tou agiou Nikodimou tou Agioreitou* (Athens, 1983). Evthymios wrote his biography in 1813, four years after the death of Nikodimos.

[30] For a long time there was considerable doubt about the origin of this last work, but the question has now been clarified by the researches of the Athonite monk Theodoritos: see K. Karaisaridis, 'Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e Macario di Corinto', in Rigo, *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, op. cit. (n. 5), pp. 62–4; Citterio, 'Nicodemo Agiorita', pp. 926–7. The original work, it seems, was written by Neophytos of Kafsokalyvia, and this was published anonymously in Venice in 1777. The 1777 publication was then extensively revised and expanded by Nikodimos, before being reissued, once more anonymously, at Venice in 1783.

For Nikodimos's views on frequent communion, see M.-J. Le Guillou, 'L'Athos et la vie eucharistique', in *Le Millénaire du Mont Athos 963–1963*, vol. 2 (Venice/Chevetogne, 1964), pp. 111–20; R. A. Klostermann, 'Nikodemos Hagiorites über das Abendmahl', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 45 (1979), 405–9.

Modern works, when referring to the *Philokalia*, often speak as if Nikodimos were the chief or even the sole editor. If, however, the account by Evthymios is accurate, then the part played by Makarios was at least as important as that of Nikodimos. For, according to Evthymios, the original initiative for the publication of the work came from Makarios, and it was he who selected the writings to be included in it. Nikodimos for his part revised and corrected the text, composed the eight-page general preface to the book, and wrote the brief, introductory notes on each author. Evthymios does not say that Nikodimos enlarged or altered the choice of texts made by Makarios, but this is of course a possibility.

Other contemporary accounts by St Paisy Velichkovsky[31] and St Athanasios of Paros[32] differ from Evthymios in making no mention of Nikodimos's contribution and in treating Makarios as the sole editor of the *Philokalia*. Evthymios, however, who was in close personal contact with Nikodimos, is almost certainly more trustworthy. In particular, there are many similarities in style and content between the preface to the *Philokalia* and other compositions which are undoubtedly by Nikodimos. In other respects, however, as we shall see, Paisy

[31] Paisy's account of the preparation of the *Philokalia*, together with his description of the translations that he himself made on Athos and in Moldavia, are to be found in the long and important letter that he wrote around 1782 to Archimandrite Theodosy of the St Sophrony hermitage. For the original text of this letter, see V. Pelin (ed.), 'The Correspondence of Abbot Paisie from Neamţ (III). Letter to Teodosie, Archimandrite at the Sofroniev Hermitage', *Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes*, 32: 3–4 (1994), 349–66; certain additional passages are to be found in *Zhitie i Pisaniya Moldavskago Startsa Paisiya Velichkovskago*, edited by the Optina Hermitage (Moscow, 1847), pp. 197–217. For a full translation of the letter in Italian, see A. Mainardi, *Paisij, lo Starec*, Atti del III Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità russa 'Paisij Veličkovskij e il suo movimento spirituale', Bose, 20–3 settembre 1995 (Magnano, 1997), pp. 270–304. Large extracts in English are given *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, ed. Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) of the St Herman of Alaska Brotherhood (Platina, 1976), pp. 77–85, 110–13, 117–19, 180–94. Consult also S. Chetverikov, *Starets Paisii Velichkovskii: His Life, Teachings, and Influence on Orthodox Monasticism* (Belmont, 1980), pp. 119–25, 135, 144–51.

[32] See K. K. Papoulidis, *Makarios Notaras (1731–1805), Archiepiskopos proin Korinthias* (Athens, 1974), p. 66 and n. 112.

provides valuable supplementary information about the preparation of the *Philokalia.*

Once embarked on literary work, Nikodimos continued to write with indefatigable energy for the remainder of his life. The quantity and range of his *oeuvre* is formidable. 'Who could recount all his labours and all his works of love?' exclaimed the Romanian monk Ioan of Neamţ, writing in 1807.[33] In the catalogue of his writings provided by Citterio, there are twenty-six major works, some of them extending to more than a thousand pages each; most of these are editions and translations, but they include several original writings. Citterio also lists thirty-two liturgical offices and canons and five shorter pieces, not counting a number of unpublished compositions; there is also the saint's correspondence, little of which has so far appeared in print, but which is said to survive in manuscript.[34] Cavarnos gives a more detailed list of 109 items.[35]

Among the original writings of Nikodimos, the most important is *Symvoulevtikon Encheiridion* [*A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*], which has been translated into English.[36] This is severe in its warnings to clergy, especially bishops; but Nikodimos had good reason to write as he did. It is severe also in its insistence upon the need to guard the senses and imagination; yet Nikodimos emphasizes at the same time that there is also a good use of the senses, when the beauty of the material creation raises our mind to God the Creator; and a good use of the imagination, when it is employed in meditating on Christ's passion and resurrection. There is a valuable section on the heart and the Jesus Prayer, while the importance of studying Holy Scripture is strongly underlined.

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[33] Cited by V. Pelin, 'L'opera di Nicodemo l'Aghiorita in Romania', in Rigo, *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, p. 251.

[34] Citterio, *L'orientamento*, pp. 341–72. On Nikodimos's correspondence, see Citterio, 'Nicodemo Agiorita', p. 939, where doubts are expressed about the actual existence of the manuscript which is supposed to contain the saint's letters.

[35] Cavarnos, *St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite*, pp. 96–114. For a full description of Nikodimos's writings, see P. Nikolopoulos, 'Vivliogaphiki epistasia ton ekdoseon Nikodimou tou Agioreitou', in *Praktika symposiou 'Nikodimou Agioreitoutou Naxiou pnevmatiki martyria' (Naxos 8–11 July 1993)* (= Epetiris Etaireias Kykladikon Meleton 16 [2000]), pp. 361–667.

[36] Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, ET P. Chamberas, with an introduction by G. Bebis, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York/Mahwah, 1989). Another original work by Nikodimos, also of considerable interest, is *Christoitheia ton Christianon* [*The Good Customs of Christians*], published in 1803: see A.-E. N. Tachiaos, 'Nicodemo l'Aghiorita: Un esempio di vita per i laici ortodossi', in Rigo, *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, pp. 193–204.

As an editor and exegete, Nikodimos included in his scope most branches of Christian literature. In addition to his work on the New Martyrs,[37] he compiled a general collection of saints' lives for every day of the year, entitled *Synaxaristis*. He wrote commentaries on Scripture, on the Church canons,[38] and on the liturgical texts, all of them richly illustrated with patristic quotations; aided by his photographic memory, he was able to cite the Fathers with astonishing facility. The *Eortodromion* of Nikodimos, interpreting the hymnography of the great feasts, proved a valuable aid to me when working with Mother Mary of Bussy-en-Othe on *The Festal Menaion*.[39]

Equally important are the editions of the Fathers undertaken by Nikodimos. In addition to the *Philokalia* and the *Evergetinos*, on which he worked with Makarios of Corinth, he also edited the correspondence of St Barsanouphios and St John of Gaza,[40] and assisted Dionysios Zagoraios with the edition of St Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022) that was published in 1790 (this appeared under the name of Dionysios alone, but it seems to be chiefly the work of Nikodimos). By an unhappy mischance the three-volume edition of the collected works of St Gregory Palamas, to which Nikodimos devoted much time and energy, never saw the light of day. The Greek printer in Vienna to whom the manuscript had been sent, George Makridis-Poulios, was a close associate of Rhigas Velestinlis, the protomartyr of the Greek revolution, and he was heavily involved with Rhigas in producing anti-Ottoman propaganda. When, at the prompting of the Turkish authorities, the Austrian police arrested Rhigas in 1798, they seized the stock of manuscripts awaiting publication in Poulios's office, including the edition of Palamas. Most of the text of this was lost, although the introduction by Nikodimos was recovered and eventually published.[41] The destruction of the edition of Palamas was a severe blow to Nikodimos, and as a result the bulk of Palamas's theological work remained unpublished and neglected for a further 150 years.

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[37] See n.23.

[38] See n.22.

[39] Cf. Mother Mary and Archimandrite K. Ware, *The Festal Menaion* (London, 1969), p. 18.

[40] See n.7.

A surprising genre among the writings of Nikodimos are the adaptations that he produced of Roman Catholic writings from the Counter-Reformation period.[42] The best known of these is *Unseen Warfare*, based on the *Combattimento Spirituale* of Lorenzo Scupoli (*c.*1530–1610). Nikodimos did not claim to be himself the author of this work, but merely stated on the title-page that it was 'composed some time ago by a certain wise man'.[43] Although of course well aware of the fact, Nikodimos refrained from pointing out that the 'wise man' in question, so far from being Orthodox, was actually a Roman Catholic. When Gerald Palmer (1904–84), the co-translator of the English *Philokalia*, was preparing an English version of *Unseen Warfare*, he wrote to his spiritual father the Russian Hieromonk Nikon of Karoulia (1875–1963), asking who the author of *Unseen Warfare* might be, since evidently it was not Nikodimos himself. Fr Nikon, who had originally suggested to Gerald that he should translate the work, may well have had suspicions about its authorship; but in his reply he simply said in a charming but unhelpful manner, 'This beautiful book lies open on my table each morning after breakfast.'[44]

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[41] It appeared in *Ekklesiastiki Alitheia*, year 4, fasc. 7 (Constantinople, 1883), pp. 93–101. On this incident, see A. Rigo, 'Nicodemo Aghiorita e la sua edizione delle opere di Gregorio Palamas', in Mainardi, *Paisij, lo Starec*, pp. 165–82. Compare J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Patristica Sorbonensia 3 (Paris, 1959), pp. 337–8; Citterio, *L'orientamento*, pp. 350–2; Citterio, 'Nicodemo Agiorita', pp. 924–5. On the press of Poulios, see C. M. Woodhouse, *Rhigas Velestinlis: The Proto-Martyr of the Greek Revolution* (Limni, 1995), pp. 36–8, 47, 120, 127, 129, 140.

[42] See M. Viller, 'Nicodème l'Hagiorite et ses emprunts à la littérature spirituelle occidentale. Le *Combat Spirituel* et *Les Exercises* de S. Ignace dans l'Eglise byzantine', *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, 5 (1924), 174–7, 416; Citterio, *L'orientamento*, pp. 112–36; B. Bobrinskoy, 'Encounter of Traditions in Greece: St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749–1809)', in Dupré and Saliers (eds), *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, pp. 447–57; Citterio, 'Nicodemo Agiorita', pp. 943–55. It used to be thought that Nikodimos himself translated the works in question from Italian, but now it has been proved that he drew on existing translations made by the Patmian Emmanuel Romanitis. It is doubtful whether Nikodimos in fact knew Italian: see E. N. Phranghiskos, 'La questione della conoscenza delle lingue straniere in Nicodemo l'Aghiorita', in Rigo, *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, pp. 205–22.

[43] For a reproduction of the title-page of the first edition of *Unseen Warfare* (Venice, 1796), see G. G. Ladas and A. D. Chatzidimou, *Elliniki Vivliographia ton eton 1796–1799* (Athens, 1973), p. 16. On the changes (often considerable) made by Nikodimos to Scupoli's text, consult the interesting (but not always

In addition to the *Combattimento Spirituale* of Scupoli, Nikodimos produced a Greek edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, using the expanded version of Giampetro Pinamonti. Nikodimos's widely respected work on confession, *Exomologitarion*, is also for the most part a direct translation of two books by another Roman Catholic writer, Paulo Segneri, *Il confessore istruito* and *Il penitente istruito*. The work *On Continual Communion*,[45] while drawing extensively on Roman Catholic sources, does not seem to be based on any single Western prototype.

This readiness to disseminate among the unsuspecting Orthodox public Roman Catholic works of piety, largely unchanged, is all the more surprising in that Nikodimos in his *Pedalion* upheld the view that the Roman Church lacks valid baptism, and so its members, if received into Orthodoxy, have to be rebaptized.[46] Why, then, did he

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accurate) introduction to the English translation, written by H. A. Hodges: *Unseen Warfare: being the Spiritual Combat and Path to Paradise of Lorenzo Scupoli as edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse*, ET E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London, 1952), pp. 13–67.

[44] For a photograph of Fr Nikon, see Speake, *Mount Athos*, p. 228. It was Fr Nikon who gave his blessing to the two-volume translation of the *Philokalia* made by Kadloubovsky and Palmer, and who selected the texts which they included; he also wrote the anonymous foreword in *Writings from the Philokalia*, pp. 5–7. See also nn. 6 and 107.

[45] See n. 30.

[46] *Pedalion*, pp. 33–6; *The Rudder*, pp. 68–76. For eighteenth-century Greek views on Latin baptism, see T. [=K.] Ware, *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of the*

choose to make use of Roman Catholic authors in his way? Certainly it cannot have been due to any ignorance on his part of the riches of Greek patristic spirituality, of which he had on the contrary an extremely detailed knowledge, as is evident from his editions of the *Philokalia* and the *Evergetinos*, of Barsanouphios, Symeon the New Theologian, and Palamas. If, then, he drew upon texts from the Counter-Reformation West, it was not because he had no other material available.

Possibly Nikodimos valued the psychological insight displayed by the Western authors, and their warmly affective tone. He may also have considered that the techniques of discursive, imaginative meditation described by Scupoli and Loyola would help Orthodox who found the imageless, 'apophatic' prayer recommended in the *Philokalia* to be largely beyond their capacity. Whatever the reason, the willingness of Nikodimos to draw upon Roman Catholic texts indicates how – despite the bitterly polemical attitude of Greek Orthodoxy towards Rome during the later eighteenth century – it was still possible for a constructive interchange to take place upon the level of spirituality.

Worn out by his unremitting literary labours, Nikodimos died in 1809, aged sixty, at the kellion of his friends the Skourtaioi, situated above Karyes. Here his relics are preserved, and the visitor is shown the dark and narrow inner room where he used to say the Jesus Prayer. I remember calling there in 1973, when I was received by the venerable yet lively Fr Ananias, reputed to be the oldest monk on the Holy Mountain (he claimed to be 105, but I think that he was only 99 at that time; he eventually died in 1977). Apologizing for the somewhat simple hospitality, he explained that he had recently lost the disciple who helped him. 'He had no business to die so young', said Fr Ananias in an irritated tone. 'He was only eighty-five.'

Greek Church under Turkish Rule (Oxford, 1964), pp. 65–107; G. D. Metallinos, '*Omologo en vaptisma ...*'. *Ermineia kai epharmogi tou Z' Kanonos tis B' Oikoumenikis Synodou ypo ton Kollyvadon kai tou Konstantinou Oikonomou* (Athens, 1983; 2nd edn., Athens, 1996); ET by Priestmonk Seraphim, *I Confess One Baptism ... Interpretation and Application of Canon VII of the Second Ecumenical Council by the Kollyvades and Constantine Oikonomos* (Holy Mountain, Athos, St Paul's Monastery, 1994).

Two things inspired St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain throughout his years on Athos. The first was a love of *hesychia*, of stillness and solitude. He found constant inspiration in Christ's statement, 'The Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21) – words that he quoted in the introduction to the *Philokalia* – and he devoted himself unreservedly to the quest for this inner Kingdom. Doubtless it was this longing for stillness that led him to live in the remote hermitages of the Athonite desert rather than in one of the large cenobitic houses. In the second place, however, he was not only a solitary but also, like St Kosmas the Aetolian, a missionary. He sought to preach the faith not through apostolic journeys but through his writings. With good reason he is shown in engravings and icons holding a pen, with a bottle of ink at his elbow. In this way his life was marked equally by silence and by words: by words that came out of silence, and by a silence more eloquent than any words. He would have agreed, I think, with the saying, 'Words are the part of silence that can be spoken.'

Learned though he was, Nikodimos never wrote with an exclusively academic aim, but always with a practical and pastoral intent. Not only the *Philokalia* but almost all his works were directed to the laity as well as to monastics and clergy. The patristic *ressourcement* that he and the other Kollyvades promoted was simultaneously both scholarly and popular. Through their publications they sought to change people's lives. And it was precisely because his writings have indeed transformed the lives of countless others that in 1955, at the request of the Holy Mountain, he was officially glorified as a saint by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. His feast is observed on the day of his death, 14 July. In the conscience of the Orthodox people he is not remembered specifically as a miracle-worker; in Orthodoxy, however, the performance of miracles is in no way essential for the recognition of a saint. The grounds for the canonization of St Nikodimos were his personal holiness and the outstanding contribution that he made to church life through his writings.

St Nikodimos was not interested in philosophical speculation, even though he sometimes quoted texts from the Greek philosophers. He was a theologian in the patristic meaning of the term – 'If you pray truly, you are a theologian', as Evagrios of Pontos (346–99) put it[47] – but he was not a 'systematic theologian' in the modern Western sense. What he sought to convey was not abstract ideas but the living experience of the Church. In his writings he is above all else a master of the spiritual life. He is rightly classified as a 'conservative', but his conservatism was always sensitive and intelligent. Yet, despite his conservatism, by a strange paradox – which often recurs in the history of the Church – the future belonged more to him than to the innovators and liberals of his day. Nikodimos's message is more relevant to the twenty-first century than that of Korais. What Fr Georges Florovsky says of St Paisy Velichkovsky is true equally of St Nikodimos: 'Paisy lived in the past, in traditions, and in Tradition. Yet he proved to be the prophet and harbinger of things to come. The return to sources revealed new roads and meant the acquisition of new horizons.'[48]

'These Works have Virtually Disappeared': The Editorial Policy of the Compilers

The *Philokalia*, despite its ever-increasing popularity – not least in the West during the second half of the twentieth century[49] – remains an enigmatic volume. Typical of its 'apophatic' character is the fact that the names of Nikodimos and of his fellow editor Makarios are not mentioned on the title-page, or indeed at any point elsewhere in the work. Recent research has left still unanswered many questions concerning the aim and contents of the *Philokalia*. What criteria guided Makarios in selecting these particular thirty-six authors? What have these thirty-six in common, which made it appropriate to include them in the volume and to exclude others? Are there master-themes throughout the *Philokalia*, which give to the collection as a whole an overall unity and coherence, and how far is it legitimate to speak of a distinctive 'spirituality' of the *Philokalia*?

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[47] *On Prayer* 61: *Philokalia* 1, 182 (under the name of Neilos the Ascetic); ET 1, 62.

[48] *Ways of Russian Theology*, Collected Works, vol. 5 (Belmont, 1979), p. 161.

[49] On this, see my remarks about the *Philokalia* as a 'time bomb', in 'The Spirituality of the *Philokalia*', pp. 20–2; also my article 'Philocalie', in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 12 (1984), cols. 1343–8.

The general arrangement of contents in the Greek *Philokalia* gives us no help in answering these questions. Except at the very end of the work, the texts are simply placed in chronological sequence, according to the supposed dates of the various authors. There is no attempt to group the material thematically, as was done, for example, by Paul in his collection *Evergetinos*. There is also no indication which writings are best suited for 'beginners', and which should be reserved for the more experienced.

The title likewise sheds little light on the scope and purpose of the work. Literally the word 'philokalia' means 'love of beauty' or 'love of what is good'. Most commentators on the *Philokalia* therefore interpret the title as signifying love for whatever is spiritually beautiful and good, love for God as the source of all things beautiful, love for whatever leads to union with the Divine and Uncreated Beauty.[50] When applied to a book, however, the word 'philokalia' may also signify no more than 'a collection of good things', an anthology. Eusebius of Caesarea, using the word in this sense, states that the third-century Bishop Beryllos of Bostra 'left various *philokalias*';[51] and when St Basil the Great and St Gregory of Nazianzus assembled a collection of extracts from Origen, they gave it the title 'Philokalia'.[52] Is this, then, the meaning of the title in the case of the *Philokalia* of Makarios and Nikodimos? Is it merely an anthology, a selection of spiritual texts chosen more or less at random, and then bound up for convenience within the covers of a single volume?

If the title 'Philokalia' is ambivalent, what can be gleaned from the introduction to the work, written by Nikodimos? Here we move on to firmer ground. Without providing an explicit answer to our queries, the introduction supplies several valuable clues. First, as already noted, Nikodimos insists that the work is addressed not only to monks and nuns but to all Christians.[53] This claim is at first sight surprising, for almost all the works included in the *Philokalia* were written by monks, with a monastic audience primarily in mind. Furthermore, except in a few minor instances, the two editors have given the texts, not in a contemporary demotic rendering – as Nikodimos does in various other publications – but in the original patristic or Byzantine Greek. This cannot have been easily intelligible to most Greek laity in the eighteenth century, or indeed to most priests or monastics. Even so, Nikodimos surely means what he says when he asserts that the *Philokalia* is intended for the Christian community as a whole.

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[50] See, for example, the explanation given in the introduction to the English *Philokalia*, 1, 13.

[51] *Ecclesiastical History* 6.20.2.

[52] *The Philocalia of Origen*, ed. J. Armitage Robinson (Cambridge, 1893).

Nikodimos offers a second clue when he states in his introduction that the *Philokalia* contains works that either are unpublished or else, if published, have grown scarce and unobtainable:

> On account of their antiquity and rarity, and because in many cases they have never been printed, these works have virtually disappeared; and, if some of them have been included in existing publications, yet the books in which they appear have become worm-eaten and totally destroyed.[54]

One criterion, then, for the selection of material in the *Philokalia* seems to have been the availability or otherwise of texts in existing publications. The editors have left out the readily accessible, and chosen the rare or unpublished.

This helps to explain why, for instance, there is nothing in the Greek *Philokalia* from St Isaac the Syrian (Isaac of Nineveh) (seventh century). Isaac may justly be reckoned as one of Nikodimos's three favourite authors, along with St Maximos the Confessor (*c.*580–662) and St Gregory Palamas.[55] Why, then, is Isaac absent? Perhaps Nikodimos and Makarios left him out because a Greek edition of his writings, prepared by Nikephoros Theotokis, had appeared only a few years before at Leipzig in 1770. Other authors of central importance for the Orthodox spiritual tradition, such as the Cappadocians, St John

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[53] *Philokalia* 1, xxii: see n. 20.

[54] *Philokalia* 1, xxi.

[55] See Citterio, *L'orientamento*, p. 130.

Chrysostom, St Dionysius the Areopagite, and St John Klimakos – all of whom are regularly cited by Nikodimos in his *Handbook* – are likewise absent from the *Philokalia*, presumably because they too were readily available in existing publications.

Makarios and Nikodimos may also have omitted certain authors from the *Philokalia*, or assigned to them only a limited amount of space, because even as early as 1777 they had begun to plan separate editions of their writings. This is perhaps the reason why, for example, there is nothing in the *Philokalia* from St Barsanouphios and St John; although Nikodimos's edition did not actually appear until 1816, he may have started to prepare it at an early stage in his Athonite life. If there is relatively little from St Symeon the New Theologian, possibly this was because Nikodimos had begun to collaborate with Dionysios Zagoraios on the edition of Symeon published in 1790. If the choice of texts from St Gregory Palamas appears somewhat incomplete, the explanation may be that Nikodimos had already started to project the complete edition which was later sent to Vienna and destroyed in 1798.

While pragmatic considerations of this kind may certainly have influenced the two editors of the *Philokalia*, there remains another, more interesting possibility. Perhaps in their choice of texts they were not innovating or relying solely on their personal judgement, but were following an existing tradition already well established on the Holy Mountain and elsewhere.[56]

As we have noted, Evthymios, Nikodimos's biographer, asserts that, when Makarios arrived on Athos in 1777, he brought with him, already prepared, the draft version of the *Philokalia*; that is to say, he had selected and assembled the material before he came to the Mountain. Evthymios also gives the impression that Makarios stayed on Athos only for a relatively short time.[57] As a personal friend of Nikodimos, Evthymios is in general a trustworthy source concerning the Hagiorite's life and work; but at this point his account needs to be scrutinized in the light of evidence from Kaisarios Daponte, monk of

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[56] I discuss this possibility more fully in my article, 'Possiamo parlare di spiritualità della Filocalia?', pp. 29–35.

[57] Evthymios, *Life of Nikodimos*, p. 640 (see n. 29).

Xeropotamou,[58] and from Paisy Velichkovsky.[59] Kaisarios was on the Mountain when Makarios came there in 1777; Paisy had left for Moldavia thirteen years earlier, but he remained in continuing contact with Athos through his disciples whom he had left behind there. Both of them, then, may have had access to accurate information about Makarios and Nikodimos.

Kaisarios and Paisy suggest that Makarios in fact stayed on the Mountain for a considerable period. Paisy even speaks of a visit of 'several years':

> The Most Reverend Kyr Makarios, former Metropolitan of Corinth [...] came to the Holy Mountain of Athos and found in all the libraries of the holy monasteries, through his unfathomable fervour and great striving, many such patristic books which until then he had not possessed. Above all, in the library of the most glorious and great monastery of Vatopedi he acquired a priceless treasure, a book on the union of the mind with God, gathered from all the Saints by great zealots in ancient times, and other books on prayer of which until then we had not heard. Having copied these out in several years by means of many skilled calligraphers and at no little expense, and having read them himself, comparing them with the originals, and having corrected them most surely and added the lives of all the holy writers of these books at the beginning of their books, he departed from the Holy Mountain of Athos with unutterable joy, having obtained a heavenly treasure upon earth. Then, coming to the most glorious city of Smyrna in Asia Minor, he sent to Venice at no little expense, paid for by the alms of Christ-lovers, thirty-six Patristic books [...] and soon, as a certain person recently informed me concerning all this, with God's help the above-mentioned books will come out from the printer into the light of day.[60]

Although in this passage Paisy makes no reference to Nikodimos's share in the editing of the *Philokalia*, in other respects he seems to be well informed. If he is correct, then Makarios only made his choice of texts *after* arriving on Athos; and in assembling his material he used the different monastic libraries there. In that case, it is possible that he found on Athos, at least in an embryonic form, various 'proto-philokalic' collections of ascetic texts on which he drew. Moreover, although Paisy does not mention this, Makarios may also have consulted various Athonite elders about the writings that they recommended to their disciples. In this way the selection of works in the *Philokalia* may reflect both a pre-existing written tradition and also a continuing oral tradition.

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[58] Daponte, 'Istorikos Katalogos', in Sathas, *Mesaioniki Vivliothiki* 3, p. 109.

[59] 'Letter to Archimandrite Theodosy', in Rose, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* (see n. 31), pp. 180–3.

[60] Rose, loc. cit.

The reference to the library of Vatopedi is noteworthy, for nowhere in the *Philokalia* itself do Makarios and Nikodimos provide any information about the manuscripts which they used (in the case of some texts, they consulted more than one manuscript, for they give occasional variant readings in the margin). Professor Anthony-Emil Tachiaos has suggested that the manuscript found by Makarios in Vatopedi may have been Cod. Vatop. 605 (thirteenth century), which he may have supplemented with Cod. Vatop. 262 (fifteenth century).[61] Neither of these corresponds exactly to the contents of the printed *Philokalia* of 1782, but in any case Paisy makes it clear that Makarios worked in several libraries and drew on a number of different manuscripts. These two manuscripts, however, and others like them, definitely provide evidence of a 'philokalic' tradition long before the appearance of the printed *Philokalia*. Continuing research may well bring to light other relevant manuscripts in Vatopedi or elsewhere on the Mountain.[62]

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[61] A.-E. Tachiaos, *O Paisios Velitskophski (1722–1794) kai i askitikophilologiki scholi tou* (Thessaloniki, 1964), p. 111. Cf. Tachiaos, 'De la Philokalia au Dobrotoljubie: la création d'un "Sbornik"', *Cyrillomethodianum*, 5 (1981), 208–13. More recently, P. Géhin has drawn attention to another Athonite manuscript, Cod. Lavra 54 (1745), of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, whose contents overlap with those of the *Philokalia*, although once more there is no exact correspondence. As this manuscript was in Smyrna at the end of the eighteenth century, probably it was not a direct source of the *Philokalia*, but it may well be related to one of the principal sources. In any case, it provides evidence of a 'philokalic' tradition prior to the publication of the printed *Philokalia*. See Géhin, 'Le Filocalie che hanno preceduto la "Filocalia"', in Rigo, *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, pp. 83–102, especially pp. 97–8, 100–2.

[62] An early example of a 'proto-philokalic' collection is the brief anthology of texts to be found in Nikephoros the Hesychast (late thirteenth century), *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart* (*Philokalia* 4, 18–28; ET 4, 194–206). Doubtless the hesychast controversy in the mid-fourteenth century greatly encouraged the compilation and dissemination of such 'philokalic' anthologies.

The possibility of such a pre-existing 'philokalic' tradition is strongly confirmed by what is known concerning the activities of Paisy Velichkovsky during his seventeen-year residence upon the Holy Mountain (1746–63). This was of course well before the publication of the Greek *Philokalia* in 1782, and indeed before Nikodimos's arrival on Athos in 1775 and Makarios's first visit in 1777. Nikodimos and Makarios never met Paisy face to face, although they were in touch with some of the latter's followers who had remained on Athos after their master's departure, such as Schema-monk Gregory.[63] Nikodimos was so greatly impressed by what he heard about Paisy from others on the Holy Mountain that in the late 1770s he left Athos, intending to join Paisy in Moldavia, but he was forced to turn back by a storm.

Now Paisy, while on Athos, made strenuous efforts to discover copies of Greek spiritual texts which he could translate into Slavonic, or which he could use when revising existing Slavonic translations. What is truly remarkable is that almost all of the texts upon which he worked were subsequently included by Makarios and Nikodimos in the printed Greek *Philokalia*. In his letter to Archimandrite Theodosy, Paisy mentioned the following twelve authors that he translated while on Athos, all of whom appear in the Greek *Philokalia*:

Antony the Great
Abba Isaiah
Hesychios
Diadochos
Theodore of Edessa
Thalassios
Philotheos
Peter of Damascus
Symeon the New Theologian (attributed to), *On Prayer*
Nikitas Stithatos
Nikephoros the Hesychast
Gregory of Sinai

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[63] See Tachiaos, *O Paisios Velitskophski*, pp. 74–5, 109; also his article, 'Mount Athos and the Slavic Literatures', *Cyrillomethodianum*, 4 (1977), 32–3.

Continuing his translation work at Dragomirna in Moldavia during 1763–75, Paisy made Slavonic versions of seven further authors, all of whom likewise figure in the Greek *Philokalia*:

John Cassian
Mark the Ascetic
Neilos (i.e. Evagrios), *On Prayer*
Makarios (in the version of Symeon Metaphrastis)
Maximos the Confessor
Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos
Kallistos Kataphygiotis[64]

Out of the thirty-six authors in the Greek *Philokalia*, then, Paisy translated no fewer than nineteen into Slavonic, at a date before Makarios and Nikodimos had begun their collaboration. Of the remaining texts by the seventeen authors not mentioned in Paisy's letter, most are relatively brief, the only significant exception being Gregory Palamas. Thus during 1746–75 Paisy, working independently, translated into Slavonic nearly four-fifths of the material subsequently included in the Greek *Philokalia* of 1782. What is more, in the account that he gave of his translation work Paisy mentioned only two authors not to be found in the Greek *Philokalia*: Isaac the Syrian and Theodore the Studite.[65]

The overlap between Paisy's translation programme and the contents of the Greek *Philokalia* is so extensive that it cannot reasonably be dismissed as mere coincidence. What, then, is the explanation? Paisy's work enjoys chronological priority, and so it is impossible that he should simply be copying Makarios and Nikodimos. It is true that, after the Greek *Philokalia* had been published in 1782, Paisy seems to have made use of it in revising his translations for the Slavonic version of the *Philokalia*, entitled *Dobrotolubiye*, that was published at Moscow in 1793.[66] But he had originally made these Slavonic translations long before 1782. So far as the published *Dobrotolubiye* is concerned, the contents of the different texts correspond almost exactly to those in the printed Greek *Philokalia*. Whether this was also the case with Paisy's Slavonic translations before they were revised on the basis of the Greek *Philokalia*, it is not possible to say in the present state of our knowledge. Further research needs to be done on Paisy's manuscripts at Neamţ and elsewhere in Romania.

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[64] Rose, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, pp. 78, 82, 112–13, 117–19.

[65] Op. cit., pp. 81, 113.

If Paisy was not simply copying Makarios and Nikodimos, what other explanation can be given for the overlap between his programme and theirs? There are two obvious possibilities. First, Nikodimos and Makarios may have consulted Paisy's disciples who had remained on the Mountain, such as Schema-monk Gregory, and may have made their selection on the basis of what these disciples told them concerning Paisy's work. But Paisy himself, in the section of his letter to Archimandrite Theodosy that was quoted above, does not suggest that this is what happened. He implies, on the contrary, that Makarios undertook independent investigations in the libraries of Mount Athos, discovering 'books on prayer of which until then we [that is to say, Paisy and his disciples] had not heard'.[67] If Paisy was surprised by the discoveries made by Makarios, then the latter cannot merely have been copying Paisy, but – even if to some extent influenced by Paisy's example – must also have been acting on his own.

This brings us to a second possibility. If Makarios was working independently, then he may be indebted, not primarily to Paisy, but rather to the same pre-existing 'philokalic' tradition on which Paisy himself had already drawn. The overlap is to be explained, at any rate in part, not by the direct influence of one upon the other, but by their joint dependence upon a common source.

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[66] Possibly the revision of Paisy's translations, made on the basis of the printed Greek *Philokalia*, was undertaken not by Paisy himself but by the committee working under the direction of Metropolitan Gabriel of St Petersburg, which supervised the publication of the *Dobrotolubiye*. On the publication of Paisy's *Dobrotolubiye*, see Nikolaj N. Lisovoj, 'Due epoche, due "Filocalie": Paisij Veličkovskij e Teofano il Recluso', in Mainardi, *Paisij, lo Starec*, pp. 183–215, especially pp. 185–91.

[67] See above, n. 60.

Nevertheless, even though there is reason to posit the presence on Athos of such a pre-existing tradition, it cannot have been at all widely known in Paisy's and Nikodimos's day. Paisy, at his first arrival on Athos, had the greatest difficulty in finding the texts for which he was searching. His experience resembles that of Gregory of Sinai four hundred years earlier. When, at the start of the fourteenth century, Gregory arrived on Athos and sought an elder to instruct him concerning prayer of the heart, for a long time he was disappointed. His biographer, Patriarch Kallistos, records him as saying:

> I saw not a few men, endowed to the highest degree with grey hairs, with understanding and with every dignity of character; but they devoted all their zeal to the active life. If asked about stillness (*hesychia*) or the guarding of the intellect and contemplation, they said that they did not so much as know about this even by name.[68]

Paisy encountered the same problem when he came to Athos in 1746. Searching for spiritual texts that he could translate into Slavonic, he made inquiries in many monasteries and sketes, but everywhere he received what he calls 'the same set answer': 'Not only have we not known such books up to now, but we have not even heard of the names of such saints.'[69] It was only when he visited the skete of St Basil – at the southern tip of Athos, not far from Katounakia and Karoulia – that he found a Greek monk who was able to supply him with copies of the works for which he was looking. This same monk, whose name Paisy does not mention, also explained why these texts were so little known:

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[68] Patriarch Kallistos I of Constantinople, *Life of St Gregory of Sinai* 6 (ed. N. Pomialovsky, p. 10, lines 12–16); cited in K. Ware, 'The Jesus Prayer in St Gregory of Sinai', *Eastern Churches Review*, 4:1 (1972), 5. Eventually Gregory found three monks at the skete of Magoula, not far from Philotheou, who were able to give him guidance. His difficulty in finding an elder experienced in hesychast prayer is puzzling, since he arrived on the Mountain when Nikiphoros the Hesychast was still alive, or at any rate was not long dead. Why did he not turn for help to Nikephoros or to his disciples? Nikephoros, however, had settled in later life in what Gregory Palamas terms 'the most isolated parts' of Athos (*Triads* 1.2.12; *Philokalia*, ET 4, 341), and this may explain why the Sinaite failed to make contact with him or his followers.

[69] Rose, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, p. 81.

> The reason for this, in my opinion, is that these works are written in the purest Greek language, which few among the Greeks understand much of now, except for learned people, and many do not understand it at all; therefore such books have now fallen into all but complete oblivion.[70]

What Paisy was told about these spiritual texts falling into 'all but complete oblivion' is fully borne out, as we have seen, by Nikodimos's statement in his introduction to the *Philokalia*, that these texts 'have virtually disappeared'.[71] Again and again, in the history of the Holy Mountain, the tradition of inner prayer has survived only as a hidden fountain.

In all this, however, there is something further that needs explanation. It is clear from Paisy's account that, before he had met the monk at St Basil's, he already knew what Greek texts to look for. How, then, had he originally come to learn about the existence of these texts? Evidently he had not learnt about them from Greek monks on the Mountain, for according to his own testimony those whom he initially met had 'never even heard of the names of such saints'. If he had become acquainted with 'the names of such saints' through reading their writings in existing Slavonic translations, the question then arises: who had introduced Paisy to these Slavonic versions?

It is not likely that he came across these texts on prayer during his four years of study (1735–9) at the Moghila Academy in Kiev, for the teaching here, as throughout the theological institutes in Ukraine and Russia at this time, was highly westernized and paid scant attention to the hesychast tradition. What, then, was Paisy's source? Almost certainly Paisy gained his initial acquaintance with hesychasm during his time in the monasteries of Moldavia (1742–6), immediately before he journeyed to Mount Athos. What is more, we can identify the spiritual father in Moldavia who turned Paisy's aspirations in a hesychast direction: it was St Basil, *Starets* of Poiana Mărului (1692–

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[70] Op. cit., p. 85.

[71] *Philokalia* 1, xxi (cf. n. 54).

1767).[72] There was evidently a close bond between the two; for when Basil travelled to Mount Athos in 1750, he conferred the monastic tonsure on Paisy.[73]

Now Elder Basil was thoroughly familiar with the hesychast tradition. In his writings he quoted from many 'philokalic' authors, such as John Cassian, Neilos, Diadochos, Maximos the Confessor, Peter of Damascus, and Symeon the New Theologian; he also composed introductions to the works of Hesychios, Philotheos, and Gregory of Sinai, all of whom appear in the *Philokalia*.[74] In all probability, then, it was through Elder Basil and his disciples in Moldavia that Paisy, prior to his sojourn on Athos, first heard about the existence of Greek writers in the 'philokalic' tradition, whose works he then attempted to discover in the libraries of the Holy Mountain, initially without success. Elder Basil constitutes a vital link in the 'philokalic' chain that extends back before Nikodimos, Makarios, and Paisy. In the early eighteenth century, so it seems, the teachings of hesychasm were better preserved in Moldavia than on the Mountain itself.

There is good reason, then, to believe that Makarios and Nikodimos, in their work as editors of the *Philokalia*, were not isolated pioneers but heirs to a pre-existing tradition, whose distant origins date back to the era of the fourteenth-century hesychast controversy, if not even earlier. The evidence about this 'philokalic' tradition is scattered and imprecise, but further exploration may reveal other links in the chain.

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[72] On Elder Basil, who was proclaimed a saint by the Romanian Church in 2003, see D. Raccanello, *La Preghiera di Gesù negli scritti di Basilio di Poiana Mărului* (Alessandria, 1986); D. Raccanello 'Vasilij de Poiana Marului', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 16 (1992), cols. 292–8; 'A Monk of the Brotherhood of Prophet Elias Skete, Mount Athos', *Elder Basil of Poiana Mărului (1692–1767)* (Liberty, St John of Kronstadt Press, 1996). On the continuing 'philokalic' tradition in Romania, see Metropolitan Seraphim Joantă, *Romania: Its Hesychast Tradition and Culture* (Wildwood, St Xenia Skete, 1992).

[73] *Elder Basil of Poiana Mărului*, p. 27.

[74] Op. cit., pp. 31–2, 34–5; for ET of the three introductions, see pp. 43–85.

'A Mystical School of Noetic Prayer': The Inner Unity of the *Philokalia*

Having investigated some of the factors which may have influenced Makarios and Nikodimos in their editorial work, let us now attempt to identify the main features of the spiritual teaching contained in the *Philokalia*. Are there recurrent and characteristic themes in the book as a whole that confer upon it a genuine unity, rendering it far more than an assemblage of basically unrelated texts? To assist us in our search for this inner coherence, let us ask three questions. What kind of a readership did the editors have in view? What is the general scope and content of the work? How does it envisage the supreme goal of the spiritual quest? Hitherto we have been examining the *Philokalia* from the outside; let us now look at it from within:

1. Readership

Here the editors of the *Philokalia* insist upon two things, which seem at first sight to be, if not contradictory, then at least in mutual tension. On the one hand, they include many texts emphasizing the crucial importance of personal guidance by an experienced spiritual director. On the other hand, they state that the *Philokalia* is a book for all Orthodox Christians, whether monastic or married, whether ordained or lay. How are these two things to be reconciled? Many Orthodox Christians who are potential readers of the *Philokalia* will not have the benefit of personal guidance from a spiritual father or mother. In that case, is it safe for them to study a book such as the *Philokalia*? Is there not a danger that this 'philokalic' material, if disseminated in printed form, will fall into the wrong hands?

As regards the first point, the need for obedience to a spiritual guide, this is a leitmotif throughout the *Philokalia*. 'When you have taken up your dwelling with a spiritual father and find that he helps you', states St Theodore of Edessa (?seventh–ninth century), 'let no one separate you from his love and from living with him. Do not judge him in any respect, do not revile him even though he censures or strikes you, do not listen to someone who slanders him to you, do not side with anyone who criticizes him.'[75] 'A person of pure faith', St Symeon the New Theologian affirms, 'will entrust everything to the decision of his spiritual father as if putting it into the hands of God. Even if you are burning with thirst, do not ask for a drink of water until on his own initiative your spiritual father urges you to drink.'[76] Nikephoros the Hesychast is no less emphatic. Speaking of the charisma of attentiveness, he says:

> Most if not all of those who attain this greatest of gifts do so chiefly through being taught. To be sure, a few without being taught receive it directly from God through the ardour of their endeavour and the fervour of their faith; but what is rare does not constitute the norm. That is why we must search for an unerring guide [...] If you do not already have such a guide, you must diligently search for one.[77]

What, then, is to be done by those who meet with no success in their search for an 'unerring guide'? Nikephoros's own suggestion is that, in the absence of spiritual guidance, they should adopt when reciting the Jesus Prayer a particular physical technique, involving control of the breathing and concentration of the intellect upon the place of the heart. Most Orthodox teachers at the present time, however, consider that this technique – while in itself theologically defensible – can, if misused, have serious negative effects upon our physical and mental health. Therefore, in direct disagreement with Nikephoros, they recommend that the technique should only be employed if a person is in fact under the immediate guidance of an experienced elder.[78]

Another possibility is to consult books such as the *Philokalia*. But the difficulty here is that general advice given in a written text will not always be applicable to the specific situation of each particular person. Without the counsel of a spiritual mother or father, how can I know that the instructions contained in a printed book are appropriate for me personally?

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[75] 'A Century of Spiritual Texts' 40: *Philokalia* 1, 310; ET 2, 21.

[76] 'Practical and Theological Texts' 16–17: *Philokalia* 3, 239; ET 4, 28.

[77] 'On Watchfulness and Guarding of the Heart': *Philokalia* 4, 26–7; ET 4, 205.

[78] See K. Ware, 'Praying with the Body: The Hesychast Method and Some non-Christian Parallels', *Sobornost incorporating Eastern Churches Review*, 14: 2 (1992), 6–35; note especially the strictures of St Ignaty Brianchaninov and St Theophan the Recluse, p. 22.

For this very reason, Paisy Velichkovsky was for a long time unwilling to allow his Slavonic translations to be issued in printed form, preferring that they should be circulated only in manuscript. In this way, so he hoped, they would be given exclusively to those who, in the eyes of their spiritual guide, were properly prepared, whereas a printed work would be available to everyone. In this connection, he wrote to his friend Archimandrite Theodosy:

> Concerning the publication in print of the Patristic books, in both the Greek and the Slavonic languages, I am seized both with joy and with fear. With joy, because they will not be given over to final oblivion, and zealots may the more easily acquire them; but with fear also, being frightened and trembling lest they be offered, as a thing that can be sold even like other books, not only to monks, but also to all Orthodox Christians, and lest these latter, having studied the work of mental prayer in a self-willed way, without instruction from those who are experienced in it, might fall into deception [...] The Patristic books, and especially those concerning true obedience, sobriety of mind and silence, heedfulness and mental prayer performed with the mind in the heart, are suitable only for the monastic order and not for all Orthodox Christians in general.[79]

It was only with reluctance, under pressure from Metropolitan Gabriel of St Petersburg, that Paisy eventually agreed to allow the printing of the *Dobrotolubiye*.

Nikodimos, however, adopted a different approach. In his introduction to the *Philokalia*, he acknowledged the problem: 'Here someone might object that it is not right to publish certain of the texts contained in this volume, since they will sound strange to the ears of many people, and may even prove harmful to some of them.'[80] Yet, notwithstanding the profound significance that he attached to personal guidance from a spiritual father, Nikodimos was prepared to issue the *Philokalia* in printed form. The potential benefit, in his view, far outweighed the possible risks. 'Occasionally some people will go slightly astray', he admitted; but many others, provided that they embark on the task of inner prayer 'with all humility and in a spirit of mourning', will derive great profit from the book.[81] If we lack a *geronta* (elder), so Nikodimos concluded, then let us entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit; for it is he who in the fundamental sense is the one and only spiritual guide.

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[79] Rose, *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, pp. 191–2; cf. Tachiaos, *O Paisios Velitskophsky*, pp. 113–14.

[80] *Philokalia* 1, xxiii.

The basic preference of Nikodimos is not in doubt. By far the best course is to search diligently and persistently for a spiritual guide, who can give us personalized instruction. Such a guide, on the basis of his discernment of our specific spiritual state, will suggest to us which parts of the *Philokalia* we should read at each point on our journey, what we should note, and what we should for the moment pass over. But if through no fault of our own we fail in our search for an elder, this does not mean that we should lay the book aside, concluding that it is not for us. Let us invoke the Paraclete as we read, and he will guide us into all truth.

When in the early 1950s Fr Nikon of Karoulia gave his blessing to Gerald Palmer and Evgeniya Kadloubovsky to publish the *Philokalia* in English translation, he took the same view as Nikodimos. Fr Nikon was well aware that many readers of the English translation would be non-Orthodox or even non-Christians, and that there was a risk involved in this. But, in common with Makarios and Nikodimos when they dispatched the manuscript of the Greek *Philokalia* to the printers in Venice, he considered that the risk was worth taking.

2. Scope and Content

One basic and deliberate limitation in the scope of the *Philokalia* is immediately evident. The work is concerned not with outer ascetic practice but with inner prayer. Only occasionally do the authors included in it provide directions about such matters as the rules of fasting, the hours of sleep, or the number of prostrations to be made when praying. Equally there is little about the recitation of the divine office or the ritual of the Liturgy. Where the Eucharist and the other sacraments are mentioned, their meaning is internalized. The focus of attention is not upon exterior observances but rather upon the interior guarding of the intellect (*nous*), upon the battle against passions and thoughts (*logismoi*), upon the acquisition of vigilance and stillness of heart; in short, the work is concerned – as Nikodimos emphasized in his introduction – with the Kingdom that is within us (Luke 17:21) and with the discovery of the 'inner self', fashioned in the Divine Image (Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16).

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[81] *Philokalia* I, xxiii–iv.

At the same time, however, there is no separation in the *Philokalia* between inner prayer and the sacraments. Even if the sacraments are internalized, that does not mean that they are undervalued. The significance of baptism and the Eucharist in the ascetical and mystical life is particularly clear in the *Century* of St Kallistos and St Ignatios Xanthopoulos, dating from the late fourteenth century. The authors commence their treatise by affirming that the foundation of all Christian life is the grace of baptism, personal and inalienable to each one of us. In our beginning is our end: the goal of the spiritual journey, they state, is 'to return to that perfect spiritual recreation and renewal by grace, which was given to us freely from on high at the beginning in the sacred font'.[82] Then, after discussing at length the struggle against the passions and the practice of the Jesus Prayer, the Xanthopouloi turn at the end of the *Century* to the Eucharist. Anticipating the Kollyvades, they recommend 'continual communion', by which they mean if possible daily communion.[83]

Just as there is no separation in the *Philokalia* between inner prayer and the sacraments, so equally there is no disjunction between spirituality and doctrine. While writings of a strictly dogmatic character are not included in the *Philokalia*, the teaching on the evil thoughts and the virtues, on the invocation of the Holy Name and prayer of the heart, is regularly placed in a theological context, being linked to the doctrines of the Trinity, of creation and the fall, and to the events of Christ's saving 'economy', to his incarnation, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming. In this way the *Philokalia* conforms to Vladimir Lossky's criterion:

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[82] 'Century' 4: *Philokalia* 4, 199; ET Kadloubovsky and Palmer, *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, p. 166. For similar teaching on the recovery of baptismal grace, see Gregory of Sinai, *On the Signs of Grace and Delusion* 1–3: *Philokalia* 4, 66–9; ET 4, 257–9. Nikodimos also speaks of the reactivation of baptismal grace in his introduction: *Philokalia* 1, xx. On the sacramental teaching of the Xanthopouloi, see K. Ware, *A Fourteenth-Century Manual of Hesychast Prayer: The Century of St Kallistos and St Ignatios Xanthopoulos* (Toronto, Canadian Institute of Balkan Studies, 1995), pp. 29–32.

[83] 'Century' 91–2: *Philokalia* 4, 284–9; ET *Writings*, pp. 259–64.

> Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each other. One is impossible without the other [...] There is, therefore, no Christian mysticism without theology; but, above all, there is no theology without mysticism [...] Mysticism is [...] the perfecting and crown of all theology; [it is] theology *par excellence*.[84]

As regards the range of authors contained in the *Philokalia*, all of them belong to the Christian East. The one exception, St John Cassian (*c.*360–*c.*430), is more apparent than real; for, although he spent his later life in southern France and wrote in Latin, he passed his formative years in Egypt, and his writings reflect the outlook of the Desert Fathers and, more particularly, the spirituality of his teacher, Evagrios. Whereas on other occasions Nikodimos made adaptations of Roman Catholic works, in the *Philokalia* he and Makarios adhere strictly to the spiritual tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy.

Yet, although there is nothing specifically Western or Roman Catholic in the *Philokalia*, there is also nothing specifically anti-Western or anti-Catholic. In the *Pedalion* Nikodimos wrote in polemical terms against the Church of Rome, but throughout the *Philokalia* he refrains from doing so. Not without reason the Roman Catholic censors from the University of Padua, in the *licenza* or authorization that appeared at the end of the 1782 edition of the *Philokalia*, were willing to certify that the book contains nothing *contro la Santa Fede Cattolica*, 'contrary to the Holy Catholic Faith'.[85] With this estimate a contemporary Roman Catholic reader may surely agree, unless he or she happens to be a determined anti-Palamite (which fortunately most Roman Catholics today are not).

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[84] *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London, 1957), pp. 8–9.

[85] *Philokalia* (Venice, 1782), p. 1207. For obvious reasons, this *licenza* does not appear in the later editions of the *Philokalia* published in Athens.

Within the broad spectrum of Eastern Christian spirituality, the texts in the *Philokalia* reflect predominantly one particular approach: the Evagrian-Maximian orientation. This is at once apparent from the omissions. There is nothing in the *Philokalia* from Irenaeus, but that is not surprising; for in general he was largely forgotten in the Byzantine and post-Byzantine East. More significantly, there is nothing from Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, or Gregory of Nyssa; nothing likewise from the *Apophthegmata*, Barsanouphios, Dorotheos, and the Greek corpus attributed to Ephrem the Syrian; and nothing from the Dionysian writings. There are selections from the Makarian homilies, in the version of Symeon Metaphrastis, but they are assigned only a relatively small amount of space.

There may have been, as we have suggested, practical reasons for some of these omissions. Their cumulative effect, however, is to ensure that Evagrian-Maximian spirituality prevails in most of the *Philokalia*. Even though only a few pages are devoted to the works of Evagrios himself, the book as a whole makes constant use of his threefold classification of the spiritual way into the active life (*praktiki*), the contemplation of nature (*physiki*), and the contemplation of God (*theologia*).[86] It also repeats in many places Evagrios's description of prayer as a 'shedding of thoughts', a laying-aside of images and discursive thinking. 'When you are praying,' says Evagrios, 'do not shape within yourself any image of the Deity, and do not let your intellect be stamped with the impress of any form; but approach the Immaterial in an immaterial manner, and then you will understand.'[87] This is the interpretation of prayer that is presented, for example, by Diadochos, Hesychios, Peter of Damascus, Gregory of Sinai, and Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos. There are, it is true, occasional passages in the *Philokalia* that recommend imaginative meditation on the life of Christ and especially on his passion; a notable instance occurs in the *Letter to Nicolas* by Mark the Ascetic (alias Mark the Monk).[88] Yet, in general, the manner of praying advocated in the *Philokalia*, particularly in connection with the Jesus Prayer, is the 'non-iconic' or 'apophatic' prayer taught by Evagrios.

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[86] The title-page of the *Philokalia* refers not only to the threefold Evagrian scheme but also to the somewhat different triadic pattern put forward in the Dionysian writings: purification (*katharismos*), illumination (*photismos*), and perfection (*teleiosis*). Within the *Philokalia* itself the two schemes are sometimes combined, for example, by Nikitas Stithatos (eleventh century). But in general it is the Evagrian terminology that predominates.

[87] 'On Prayer' 67, 71: *Philokalia* 1, 182; ET 1, 63–4.

Three master-themes bind together the teaching of the *Philokalia* concerning inner prayer:

(i) *Nepsis*. The centrality of this quality is at once evident from the title that Nikodimos and Makarios gave to their work, *Philokalia of the Holy Neptic* [*Fathers*], *Philokalia ton Ieron Neptikon*. *Nepsis*, a key concept in Eastern Christian spirituality, signifies inner sobriety, lucidity, alertness, watchfulness, and vigilance. In a remarkable passage at the start of his work *On Watchfulness and Holiness*, Hesychios links *nepsis* with a wide range of fundamental themes: with attentiveness (*prosochi*), purity of heart, guarding of the intellect, the Jesus Prayer, stillness, and contemplation.[89] In his introduction to the *Philokalia*, Nikodimos rightly characterizes *nepsis* as 'all-embracing'.[90]

(ii) *Hesychia*. Among the various qualities with which Hesychios connects *nepsis*, none is more important than *hesychia*, stillness or silence of the heart.[91] This is a second unifying master-theme in the *Philokalia*. It signifies not so much outer as inner quiet, not so much the avoidance of external speech as interior freedom from images and concepts. As Gregory of Sinai expresses it, adapting the phrase from Evagrios cited above, '*Hesychia* is a shedding of thoughts.'[92] *Hesychia* is thus a form of inner nakedness, of noetic poverty. The hesychast is one who strives to advance from the multiplicity of discursive thinking to the simplicity of silent contemplation. In the words of Gregory of Sinai, 'Keep your intellect free from colours, forms and shapes.'[93] As he writes elsewhere, 'Let us seek to possess only the heart-engrafted energy in a way that is totally without form or shape.'[94] Summing up his message, he says, 'Be a hesychast, not a phantast.'[95] In stating this, the authors in the *Philokalia* had no intention of downgrading or repudiating liturgical prayer, with its abundance of symbolic imagery. They took it for granted that the hesychast would read Scripture, recite the Psalms, and participate in the Church's sacramental life. All that they wished to do was to draw attention to the possibility, alongside liturgical worship, of another way of praying that transcends the visual imagination and the reasoning brain. Evagrios's description of prayer as a 'shedding of thoughts' was never intended, either by him or by others, as a comprehensive definition of all forms of prayer.

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[88] *Philokalia* 1, 134–5; ET 1, 155–6; ed. G.-M. de Durand, *Sources chrétiennes* 455 (Paris, 2000), 134–40. Fr de Durand questions the Marcan authorship of the *Letter to Nicolas*, in my view on insufficient grounds.

[89] 'On Watchfulness and Holiness' 1–6: *Philokalia* 1, 141–2; ET 1, 162–3.

[90] *Philokalia* 1, xx.

[91] 'On Watchfulness and Holiness' 5: *Philokalia* 1, 142; ET 1, 163.

[92] 'On Prayer' 5: *Philokalia* 4, 82; ET 4, 278; citing St John Klimakos, *Ladder of Divine Ascent* 27 (*PG* 88.1112A); cf. Evagrios, *On Prayer* 71 (n. 87).

(iii) *The Jesus Prayer*. This state of *nepsis* and *hesychia* is acquired, according to the *Philokalia*, above all through the 'remembrance' (*mnimi*) and 'invocation' (*epiklesis*) of the Holy Name of Jesus. As is emphasized by the fourteenth-century authors in the work, the Jesus Prayer enables the intellect (*nous*) to descend into the heart (*kardia*), thus bringing about a union between the two.[96] Two points about the Jesus Prayer are consistently underlined in the pages of the *Philokalia*: the invocation of the Name should be as far as possible continuous, for its purpose is precisely to assist us to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17); and it should also be as far as possible unaccompanied by images and discursive thinking, for its aim is equally to initiate us into *hesychia*.

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[93] 'On Prayer' 7: *Philokalia* 4, 85–6; ET 4, 283.

[94] 'On the Signs of Grace and Delusion' 3: *Philokalia* 4, 68; ET 4, 259.

[95] 'On Prayer' 7: *Philokalia* 4, 85; ET 4, 283; cf. 'On Commandments and Doctrines' 118: *Philokalia* 4, 53; ET 4, 240. By a 'phantast' is meant one who depends on the *phantasia* or imagination.

[96] On the meaning of the terms *nous* and *kardia*, see K. Ware, 'Prayer in Evagrius of Pontus and the Macarian Homilies', in R. Waller and B. Ward (eds), *An Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (London, 1999), pp. 14–30. For further bibliography on the Jesus Prayer, see K. Ware, 'The Beginnings of the Jesus Prayer', in B. Ward and R. Waller (eds), *Joy of Heaven: Springs of Christian Spirituality* (London, 2003), pp. 1–29.

Makarios and Nikodimos include in the *Philokalia* various texts which propose the use of a physical technique to be employed with the Jesus Prayer, involving in particular the control of the breathing.[97] A disproportionate emphasis has been placed on these passages by certain Western writers, some of whom see here a form of 'Byzantine Yoga'. It becomes clear, however, when these passages are read in the context of the *Philokalia* as a whole, that the physical technique is no more than an optional accessory, helpful to some, yet by no means indispensable. It is very far from constituting the essence of the Jesus Prayer, for this can be offered in its fullness without the use of any physical technique at all. All that is necessary in the practice of the Jesus Prayer is to invoke the Holy Name with faith and love; everything else is secondary.

Although texts in the *Philokalia* link the recitation of the Jesus Prayer with the rhythm of the breathing, nowhere is it suggested that the Prayer should be co-ordinated with the beating of the heart; and most Orthodox teachers regard such a practice as highly dangerous. Somewhat surprisingly there is no reference anywhere in the *Philokalia* to the employment of a prayer rope (Greek *komvoschoinion*; Slavonic *tchotki*) in conjunction with the Prayer. The use of prayer beads, in one form or another, is certainly both ancient and widespread, being found in non-Christian as well as Christian contexts; its adoption specifically in the Christian East, however, is an obscure matter that requires further investigation.[98] Certainly, as can be seen from the icons of monastic saints, the *komvoschoinion* was in common use in the Orthodox world by the seventeenth century.

While the invocation of the Holy Name is undoubtedly one of the fundamental themes in the *Philokalia*, it would be a serious mistake to regard the work primarily as a manual on the practice of the Jesus Prayer, with not much else besides. Some of the 'Little Philokalias' published in the West, by concentrating one-sidedly on the Jesus Prayer, risk giving a misleading impression of the total character of the work. In reality, as regards the first three volumes, except in Hesychios, Diadochos, and the *Discourse on Abba Philimon*, there are virtually no references to the Jesus Prayer. The two authors to whom the largest amount of space is allotted in the *Philokalia*, Maximos the Confessor and Peter of Damascus (?twelfth century), nowhere mention the Prayer at all. It is only in the two final volumes that the invocation of the Name begins to occupy a central place, and even here most of the space is devoted to other topics.

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[97] See above, n. 78.

[98] The book of E. Wilkins, *The Rose-Garden Game: The Symbolic Background to the European Prayer-Beads* (London, 1969), does not shed much light on this matter.

When, therefore, the *Philokalia* is read in its entirety, it becomes evident that the editors were concerned to place the invocation of the Name in its wider ascetic and contemplative context. They did not regard the Jesus Prayer simply as a devotional 'technique', to be cultivated in isolation from the Christian life as a whole. Yet, even though 'philokalic' spirituality cannot be reduced baldly to the recitation of the Jesus Prayer, yet the practice of the Prayer does indeed constitute a vital unifying thread within the complex tapestry of the *Philokalia*.

3. *Goal*

The general aim and purpose of the spiritual life, as presented in the *Philokalia*, is plainly affirmed in the opening sentence of the introduction by Nikodimos:

> God, the blessed nature, perfection that is more than perfect, the creative principle of all that is good and beautiful, Himself transcending all goodness and all beauty, in His supremely divine plan preordained from all eternity the deification of humankind.[99]

This, then, is our supreme goal as created human persons: to attain *theosis*, 'deification' or 'divinization'. In the words of St Basil the Great (*c*.330–79), 'I am a creature that has received the command to become god.'[100] We are not called merely to obey and imitate God in a moralistic fashion, but it is our vocation to participate by grace directly and organically in the divine life and glory, becoming one with the Holy Trinity in a transforming interchange of love. Such is the basic message of the *Philokalia*. The ideal of *theosis* is the most decisive of all the connecting threads that bind the *Philokalia* in unity.

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[99] *Philokalia* I, xix.

[100] See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations* 43.48. The standard study of deification, old but not outdated, is still J. Gross, *La divinisation du chrétien d'après les*

This divinizing participation is understood within the *Philokalia* primarily in terms of the essence/energies distinction: union with God signifies union with the divine energies, not the divine essence.[101] As Maximos the Confessor expresses it, 'We do not know God from his essence';[102] he 'never issues from the hiddenness of his essence', and 'according to his essence he remains always a mystery'.[103] Yet, while there can be knowledge of God or union with him on the level of essence, it is possible for human beings to attain, in their relationship with God, 'identity with respect to energy', to use the bold phrase of Maximos: 'This identity with respect to energy constitutes the deification of the saints.'[104] The implications of this distinction-in-unity between God's essence and his uncreated energies are spelt out in one of the most difficult yet fundamental texts in the entire *Philokalia*, the *Topics of Natural and Theological Science* by Gregory Palamas.[105]

It is true that only a relatively small proportion of the *Philokalia* is devoted explicitly to the essence/energies distinction. The book as a whole is very far from being simply a handbook on the Palamite controversy, just as it is much more than a manual on the Jesus Prayer. But the basic truth that the essence/energies distinction seeks to safeguard – that God is at one and the same time totally transcendent and totally immanent – underlies the *Philokalia* from beginning to end, and confers upon it an integrated coherence. There is union with God but not confusion, personal encounter face to face with God but not absorption, participation in the divine but not annihilation: that is what

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Pères grecs (Paris, 1938); ET by P. A. Onicha, *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers* (Anaheim, 2002).

[101] For a classic statement of the essence/energies distinction, see Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 67–90.

[102] 'On Love' 1.96: *Philokalia* 2, 13; ET 2, 64.

[103] 'Various texts' 3 [1].7, 9: *Philokalia* 2, 92; ET 2, 165, 166.

[104] 'Various texts' 6 [4].19: *Philokalia* 2, 150; ET 2, 240.

[105] 'Topics' 64–150: *Philokalia* 4, 154–87; ET 4, 376–417.

Maximos and Palamas were concerned to affirm when they differentiated between God's essence and his energies, and that is also the living heart of 'philokalic' spirituality.

I am sometimes asked: in what order should the different treatises in the *Philokalia* be read? Where should we begin? One possibility is to follow the advice of the King of Hearts to the White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: 'Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end; then stop.' That, however, is probably not the wisest plan so far as the *Philokalia* is concerned. As an alternative I suggest the following sequence, which corresponds in part, although not entirely, to the reading-list supplied in a dream to the Russian Pilgrim by his dead *starets*,[106] and to the similar list given by Fr Nikon to the English translators of the *Philokalia*:[107]

(1) Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, 'Century' (*Philokalia* 4, 197–295; ET *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, 164–270).

(2) Hesychios, 'On Watchfulness and Holiness' (*Philokalia* 1, 141–73; ET 1, 162–98).

(3) Evagrios, 'On Prayer' (*Philokalia* 1, 176–89; ET 1, 55–71).

(4) 'A Discourse on Abba Philimon' (*Philokalia* 2, 241–52; ET 2, 344–57).

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[106] *The Pilgrim's Tale*, ed. A. Pentkovsky and tr. T. A. Smith, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York/Mahwah, 1999), pp. 81–2. The Pilgrim is told to read first of all Nikiphoros the Hesychast; then the 'second book' by Gregory of Sinai (i.e., not *On Commandments and Doctrines* and *Further Texts*, but the three treatises that follow); then Symeon the New Theologian, *The Three Methods of Prayer* (spurious) and *On Faith* (genuine); and finally Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos. I have omitted Nikephoros and *The Three Methods of Prayer* from my own list, because of my reservations about the physical technique that they advocate (see n. 78). By the same token I advise the reader, unless under the guidance of a spiritual father, not to follow the directions about the physical technique given by Gregory of Sinai and the Xanthopouloi.

[107] Kadloubovsky and Palmer, in their translation *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, pp. 21–270, open with the same four authors as in the Pilgrim's reading-list, given in the same order, but with additional texts taken from Gregory of Sinai and Symeon the New Theologian.

(5) St Symeon the New Theologian, 'On Faith' (*Philokalia* 5, 73–80; ET 4, 16–24).

(6) Gregory of Sinai, 'On the Signs of Grace and Delusion'; 'On Stillness'; 'On Prayer' (*Philokalia* 4, 66–88; ET 4, 257–86).

'Not a book but a library': so Kaisarios Daponte described the *Philokalia.*[108] It is, however, a library with a specific character and an all-embracing unity. Although it has much to say about love for our fellow humans and practical compassion, its theme is not social and political action. Equally its primary subject is not outward asceticism or liturgical prayer. Its concern is rather with the 'inner Kingdom' of the heart, and it shows how this 'inner Kingdom' is to be explored through the acquisition of *nepsis* and *hesychia*, and through the ceaseless invocation of the Holy Name of Jesus. It sets before us, as our ultimate *raison d'être*, the attainment of self-transcending *theosis*, through a union of love whereby we participate in God's uncreated energies, although not in his essence. In this way it proclaims both the otherness and the nearness of the eternal; God is beyond and above the entire creation, the greatest mystery of all mysteries, yet he is at the same time everywhere present and fills all things. Although the *Philokalia* is neither exhaustive nor systematic, none the less these unifying master-themes justify us in speaking of a distinctively 'philokalic' spirituality. The work is indeed exactly what St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain claimed it to be: 'a mystical school of noetic prayer'.[109]

Such, then, is the scene set before us as we pursue our journey through time along the Athonite Riviera, and emerge from one of the black tunnels into the sudden viewpoint of the late eighteenth century. Looking out from the window of our spiritual train, we see the Kollyvades, rallying to the defence of the neptic tradition of the Orthodox Church, and reviving the teaching of the fourteenth-century hesychasts. We see St Nikodimos, pen in hand, tirelessly composing his vast array of commentaries, editions, and original writings. Above all we see him in the company of the one who was spiritually his elder brother, St Makarios of Corinth, as the two of them labour together on the text of the *Philokalia*, the masterwork with which their names will always be associated. As we watch them, we may agree with a contemporary Athonite monk, Fr Nikon of New Skete: 'The *Philokalia* is a work of the Holy Spirit.'[110]

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[108] 'Istorikos Katalogos', in Sathas, *Mesaioniki Vivliothiki*, 3, 109.

[109] *Philokalia* 1, xxiii.

Further Reading[111]

C. Cavarnos, *St Nicodemos the Hagiorite*, Modern Orthodox Saints 3 (Belmont, MA, 1974).

Chariton of Valamo, *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology* (London, 1966) (nineteenth-century spiritual writers in Russia).

L. Dupré and D. E. Saliers (eds), *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, World Spirituality: An Encyclopaedic History of the Religions Quest 18 (New York, 1989), pp. 417–76 (the eighteenth-century hesychastic renaissance and its influence in Russia).

J. M. E. Featherstone (tr.), *The Life of Paisij Velyčkovs'kyj* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

H. A. Hodges, introduction to *Unseen Warfare*, tr. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London, 1952), pp. 13–67.

E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (trs), *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London, 1951).

J. Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (New York, 1974) (an overview of the hesychastic tradition).

Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, *A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, 1989).

G. E. H. Palmer, P. Sherrard and K. Ware, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, 4 vols (London, 1979–95) (vol. 5 in preparation).

A. Pentkovsky (ed.) and T. Allan Smith (tr.), *The Pilgrim's Tale*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, 1999).

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[110] Nikon Neoskitiotis (not to be confused with Nikon of Karoulia), 'La Filocalia al Monte Athos oggi', in Rigo, *Nicodemo l'Aghiorita e la Filocalia*, p. 175.

[111] See also the bibliographical notes in the text; only works in English are mentioned here.

[S. Rose, ed.], *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* (Platina, CA, 1976).

S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge, 1968), esp. pp. 338–407 (on the general historical background).

K. Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, rev. edn. (New York, 1995), pp. 105–32 (hesychast prayer).

——, The *Inner Kingdom* (New York, 2000), pp. 75–151 (*hesychia* and spiritual fatherhood).

SISTER MAGDALEN

St Silouan, a Modern Athonite Saint[1]

Friends are those who love the reality as it is. Friends of Mount Athos are therefore well advised to get to know its reality from its saints. When we read about Mount Athos, it seems to me that we find two approaches, very different in character. One I would characterize as 'journalistic'. As soon as you see in the first line of the article or the blurb on the book's back cover a reference to the banishment of women and hens, you know that you are in the 'journalistic' category. If there are photographs, there has to be one of a huge ancient refectory where a few monks are having a meal and listening to a reading, and the caption informs you that they are drinking wine while hearing sermons against gluttony.

The second approach is in my view both more faithful to the reality and more edifying: it tries to show Athos as a spiritual phenomenon. Thankfully such works are abundant, and even in the last decade a score of biographies of Athonite holy men has appeared in English. There are, too, books which start out as travelogues, whose authors became touched by a spark of the often hidden fire burning in the hearts of men of prayer, and in the places and sacred objects sanctified by this prayer over the centuries.

St Silouan lived recently and was 'given' to the Church by canonization in 1987, so he is a man of our times in two senses. The patriarchal act of canonization gave him the title St Silouan the Athonite, bearing witness to the fact that he is a fruit of the Athonite tradition. In him we can glimpse what makes of Athos a spiritual power station for the world, and see its relevance for all of us, wherever we live. If we take the best examples of Athonite life, we are not being naive about any human weaknesses one could find there, or about any of the so-called 'anachronisms' that puzzle the journalistic authors. We do, though, put these phenomena in their rightful place in the scheme of things.

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[1] This chapter was first published in *Sourozh*, 88 (2002), 21–34, and is reprinted here with the editor's kind permission.

Archimandrite Sophrony's biography of St Silouan[2] has the advantage of being written with the psychological insight that characterizes twentieth-century writing. Furthermore, he avoids stressing the charisms of healing and prophecy that St Silouan was endowed with at the expense of presenting him as an authentic struggler for the truth. Once, a child who heard that I would be telling about St Silouan that day asked me, 'Isn't he the one that used to drink two bottles of vodka and not get drunk? Didn't he have a fight in the street?' 'Yes.' 'Oh good, I like the naughty saints best.' Do not misunderstand me: you do not have to be wicked in your youth to become a saint. Nor is it wickedness that proves you are a real human. But if you have seen the same person amusing himself as a village lad, and then spending nights weeping for the world, a bridge is built between 'everyday' life and holy life. Athos ceases to be quaint.

In 1866 Simeon Antonov was born in the village of Shovsk in the Tambov province of Russia. There he lived as one of seven children in a rural family, working from a young age in the fields, and receiving little formal schooling – two winter terms at the village primary school. Archimandrite Sophrony often referred to him as 'illiterate' or 'semi-literate'. He was, though, very intelligent and quick to grasp ideas and information. Then, during his forty-six years on Mount Athos he would receive a rich formation from listening to and reading the Scriptures, the Church's service books, and the writings of the Fathers. The notebooks he filled with writings at moments of inspiration in his later years are unique as a literary phenomenon because of all these ingredients.

From his childhood we notice an aspect of his character: his honesty to himself. At four years of age the word of a peddler – 'Where *is* this God of yours, then?' (p. 10) – had troubled his previously undoubting faith in God. Though his father reassured him that the peddler was just speaking as a fool, it took fifteen years before he again felt wholeheartedly that God exists and is alive. When he was nineteen and a carpenter, a pilgrim was telling the estate workers about St John Sezenov, whose tomb she had venerated. Hearing about the saint as a real person made Simeon reflect: 'If he was a holy man, then it means that God is here with us, so there is no point in me going off to search for Him' (p. 11). Simeon must have spent those years wondering how to find God. This reassurance was needed; and it ignited prayer in his soul, and he felt drawn towards monasticism. When this touch of grace waned, after about three months, Simeon drifted back to the life of a young village lad, who was popular with his contemporaries, and admired by many of the village girls. He fell into fornication, and into near-murder during a brawl. But a miraculous event occurred. He heard, during a dream, a voice reproaching him that his ways were ugly to look upon. He knew beyond doubt that the gentle voice belonged to the Mother of God, and he remained ever grateful to her for 'appearing from the heavens to show a young man like me his sins' (p. 15). The Queen of Athos drew him by the route that all monks take: repentance.

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[2] *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Tolleshunt Knights, 1991).

At his first 'call' he had spoken to his father about monasticism, but his father had asked him to do his military service first. The time for this came, but his second monastic call was so decisive that he did not drift into the life typical of recruits. His thoughts and intentions were already, as his comrades once teased him, 'on Mount Athos and at the Last Judgement' (p. 18).

The eagerness of Simeon's heart, and his straightforward character, together with the absence in him of any of the self-opinion typical of the well educated or the well off, made up soil ready for the seed of grace in a measure that exceeds the average. We see this grace at work in him as a result of Fr John of Kronstadt's prayers, for he had gone to take this great man's blessing, and not managing to see him, had written a note asking for his prayers before he left for Athos (p. 19). Simeon thereafter felt palpably the flames of hell roaring about him. To experience the touch of God in this 'negative' form requires a courageous soul. There are times when the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, visits us to convict us. Such painful states educate our depths, and also act as a safeguard, as in Simeon's case. Nothing on his route to the monastery could have tempted him to rethink – he was desperate to go where he knew relief and explanation were to be found. Athos is a place where God meets men's real souls.

Simeon entered the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon in autumn 1892. He came as he was. While he fitted in with all the details of Athonite life, he never played the role of an ideal monk. There is nothing artificial or constrained about his piety. As Fr Sophrony puts it (p. 63), he 'always remained true to himself'. He had a simplicity which most of us need to acquire. It was not *naiveté*; he had a lot of experience of life, and he already had a mature and wise moral judgement, as we can see from advice he gave his fellows in the battalion. His simplicity was partly due to his lack of training in critical analysis. It is also a matter of keeping one's attention on concrete reality rather than weighing up the whole world in our minds theoretically or imaginatively.

Simeon's simplicity was also bound up with his acceptance of authority. This is not in a merely juridical sense. He was sometimes confused by advice he was given by elders. But he was able to obey because he did not feel superior to anyone, least of all his administrative and spiritual superiors in the monastery. Furthermore, though his experiences of receiving mistaken counsel were of a serious character, he never stopped advocating and practising obedience to the clergy. 'The Holy Spirit gives good counsel to the soul when we hearken to the advice of our pastors' (p. 406). St Silouan remained submissive and obedient all his life. Obedience is what keeps Athonite life flowing as a living tradition rather than simply a museum of Byzantine monasticism.

It was not long after his arrival that a violent inner storm, lasting about six months, assailed him. After one dreadful experience when demons became visible to him as he tried to pray in his cell, and he felt as if God were cruel – and told him so – he went, according the programme, to Vespers at the mill chapel. There, in front of the Lord's icon, he pronounced the Jesus Prayer: 'Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.' And how did the Lord 'have mercy' on him? By appearing alive before him and filling all his being with grace that he could know as divine. Simeon's vision did not last long: it was a matter of seconds rather than minutes. 'From his words and from his writings we know that a great divine light shone about him, that he was lifted out of this world and in spirit transported to heaven, where he heard ineffable words' (p. 26). Indeed, earthly 'words cannot encompass such things' (p. 27). The divine light that shone then had still to be assimilated in order to become St Silouan's eternal possession. Such a measure of grace is usually only bestowed at the end of an ascetic's life, or he must wait for it to be given in the next life. It cannot be maintained if the body is to survive. St Paul was blinded, the Apostles on Tabor fell to the ground. And Brother Simeon carried on with his life...

For a certain time Simeon lived in Paschal joy. Then the action of grace began to diminish, and a long period of bewilderment ensued. He not only suffered from the fading away of the intensity of the grace, he again passed through torments caused by the activity of demons. A *staretz* who expressed his admiration of Simeon activated a struggle with pride. Or let us say, he could have been wiser and cultivated Simeon's natural self-abasement. As it was, fifteen years went by until Simeon – who in the meantime (in 1896) had been professed and given the name of the Apostle Silouan – even clearly understood why, after he had been granted such grace, God would seemingly forsake him and leave him to perish in hellish torment.

He was not simply looking for relief from suffering. He was seeking the Lord as a lost child seeks its mother, only more intensely. He was grieving over his loss like a widower, only more intensely. He was not looking for explanations, he was looking for Christ. And he felt demons keeping him away. He avoided sin and he prayed unceasingly – what more could he do? Ask God, and ask God, and ask God. And finally, this time in words rather than a vision, God answered him.

> 'Lord, Thou seest that I desire to pray to Thee with a pure mind but devils will not let me. Instruct me, what must I do to stop them hindering me?' And in his soul he heard, 'The proud always suffer from devils.' 'Lord,' said Silouan, 'teach me what I must do that my soul may become humble.' Once more, his heart heard God's answer, *Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not* (p. 42).

Christ's answer gave him a principle on which all the rest of his life would be founded. And gave to the world a saving spiritual formula in an epoch where both pride and despair reign supreme. We must remember that St Silouan received this word with gratitude. He was in a state of condemnation; and he was reassured that God not only had not left him forgotten in hell, but was recommending him to hold fast to this position; therefore there was no need to lose hope – only to keep self-abasement.

Fr Sophrony considered that this exhortation of Christ can be compared to Einstein's formula $E = mc^2$ in its importance for the world. It can assist even those who have not had Fr Silouan's depth of experience. On one level, it can help us, when we are in any difficult and unavoidable situation, to trust in God's providence and to be steadfast in prayer. On another level, it can teach us how to remain humble in our self-awareness. But we must note that St Silouan was commanded to *keep* his mind in hell. That is, the consciousness that he was experiencing hell was already a reality, not something on the level of imagination. Even parallel texts in the Church's tradition, which speak of self-condemnation and the remembrance of hell, do not all evince such a depth of experience. So we must not ape him artificially. If we did so, our mental energy would be focused in the unreal world of the imagination, and there would not be enough room for faith and hope to be at work in our soul's reality. We learn from St Silouan to face our own reality: our created state first of all; to have an attitude towards God of a dependent being. If we take it a stage further, we must not allow anything, from within or without, to smother gratitude towards God's providence. And then, we must not be puffed up with self-admiration. As well as this, sometimes during the church year – not least through the Gospel itself – we are reminded of the fact that we shall be judged, of the fact that eternity can be lived out either in dark torment or in unwaning light. Our conscience too can awaken us to these realities. And then we will know the power of the second half of God's word to St Silouan: whatever happens, do not despair. Everything is possible to God, who is 'with us always', even in hell. Athos plumbs the depths.

After this experience, St Silouan, over the years, learned to keep grace by burning up any thoughts of pride, or indeed any state of diminished grace, in the fire of humility. Grace, and loss of grace, and regaining of grace: this is the pattern of Christian asceticism through all the centuries and in every situation. This is what Athonite monks are busy at twenty-four hours a day. And St Silouan is witness to the fact that there is no higher charism than humble love for all humanity. After writing about the wonderworking power given to the saints he adds: 'But all my desire is to learn humility and the love of Christ, that I may offend no man but pray for all as I pray for myself' (p. 350). 'Were I to be asked what I would have from God – what gifts – I should answer: "The spirit of humility"' (p. 432).

St Silouan's monastic life progressed in an organic way. His ups and downs were real, and he did not pretend them away. He prayed through them. We have seen how the routine of Athonite life was a stabilizing factor running in the background of his spiritual 'adventures'; it never caused him to lapse into deadness of spirit, repeating prayers simply verbally, doing prostrations mechanically, confessing without repenting. In spite of nights of spiritual torment, he did not excuse himself from the long monastic services or his duties of obedience, which were demanding. He worked hard at the mill and later as steward at the monastery depot. He remained cordial in all his contacts with his fellow monks and with lay people. His distress was given expression, outlet, in confession and above all in prayer, and thus he kept from self-pity; he was not trying to gain sympathy by a display of psychological sorrow. Exterior discretion is a marked feature of Athonite monasticism.

As far as daily life of St Silouan is concerned, several incidents are recorded by Fr Sophrony and by St Silouan himself, especially in the chapters called 'Portrait of the Staretz' in Part 1, and 'Reminiscences and Conversations' in Part 2. I want here to mention an incident not recorded in the book. Fr Sophrony used to cite St Silouan as an example of someone who was 'never difficult', that is, he never rebutted an approach by coldness, he listened to those who spoke, he was not touchy or sulky, he co-operated readily with the requests of others. He was calm and gentle, with a warmth of expression that photographs have not preserved. But this does not mean that he was a 'man-pleaser'. He never compromised his integrity before God. There was only one occasion when Fr Sophrony contradicted him. During a procession which was part of a vigil service, Fr Sophrony, who was of a sickly constitution, remarked to the elder, 'It takes physical strength to be a monk.' St Silouan replied, 'It takes spiritual strength to be a monk.' A little later Fr Sophrony repeated his comment and likewise, though a little more emphatically, St Silouan repeated the same reply. When Fr Sophrony went so far as to sigh a third time and say 'Even so, you need physical strength to be a monk', St Silouan quietly moved away to a different position in the procession.

As he matured spiritually, we see two elements emerging in his life: his ability to teach others, and his prayer for all Adam. This latter is the heart of what Athonite life gives to the world. A robust peasant could end up spending entire nights for decades, seated upon a stool, and often weeping copious tears. It was the vision of Christ's love, the taste of divine compassion, that stirred up in him the compassion he felt for his fellow man. And he expressed his love above all in prayer. He lived like that because he loved; you pray fervently for those you love, and you care for their salvation as much as your own. If, when you retire to your room at night, your prayer rule is perfunctory, you will not notice whether you are far from God. In other words, his extraordinary feat of prayer grew organically out of his experience, his sincerity, and his longing for God's love to reign in his own heart and that of every human being. This is a theological reality. When God reveals himself, he is not simply imparting information; he is making known that life which those who would be in his likeness can live. 'The Holy Spirit teaches us to love God, and love keeps the commandments' (p. 498). In most cases this process of education is gradual, but in Silouan the final state possible to man on earth was given to him at the beginning of his ascetic struggle. All his life was a struggle to conform to Christ. This conformity was given in the form of love for all mankind from Adam to those in the future. 'When the soul learns love of the Lord she is filled with compassion for the whole universe' (p. 443). The love in the Holy Trinity is hypostatic: each person embraces all the fullness of divinity. Communicated to a man, this love embraces *all* a man's fellow humans, and their lives and destinies become inseparable from his own. St Silouan's desire was 'to pray for all as for himself'. St Silouan had known all the dimensions of human experience: heaven, hell, and earth, and his compassion resulted from experience rather than imagination. 'I know from experience what it means to be in the Holy Spirit and what it means to be without him' (p. 435). Elsewhere he is even more explicit: 'We know of this [the darkness of those in hell], because the Holy Spirit in the Church reveals to the saints what is in heaven and what is in hell' (p. 289). 'The Lord gives the monk the love of the Holy Spirit, and by virtue of this love the monk's heart sorrows over people because not all men are working out their salvation' (p. 407). 'Adam's Lament' (Chapter XVIII) is Silouan's lament and humanity's *cri de coeur*. God communicates his love via hearts ready to bear it. They are not mere channels, because the heart cannot be constrained to love; divine love has become their own, and is brought to earth in them.

We reach 24 September 1938, when, fully conscious to the end, St Silouan fell asleep peacefully in the Lord. Even when ill, he was more concerned for his prayer than for any medical succour he could get in the infirmary: he only agreed to go when Fr Sophrony arranged for him to be in a semi-private compartment, away from the noisily ticking clock. Facing death, his concern was that he 'had not attained humility'. His peaceful departure, according to Fr Sophrony's interpretation, is a sign that on his deathbed he regained the humility of Christ as his own state (p. 243).

St Silouan himself said that any other contribution than prayer for the world is secondary to the essence of monastic life. Serving pilgrims (and perhaps also giving talks...) is 'pleasing to God. But rest assured that it is not monastic life by a long way' (p. 408). Perhaps because they have renounced other vocations and do not set out to be teachers, monks who live as true monks often serve also by their example and their teaching. In St Silouan we have a supreme example of what effect love – the key to human fulfilment – can make. He also left a legacy of teaching on the theological and practical levels, which, as he showed, are inseparable. In the patriarchal act of canonization, St Silouan is described as 'an apostolic and prophetic teacher of the Church'. In one of the hymns in his honour he is called 'most comforting among theologians'.

A real theologian is someone who knows the truth of God by meeting the living God. His teaching and writing are a consequence, not simply of his own reading, but of his experience of God. When a theologian is uneducated, the language he uses can deceive us by its simplicity. Orthodox theologians in Paris who first read St Silouan's notes thought that there was nothing particularly significant about them. That is the only reason why Fr Sophrony set out to write a more erudite introduction. St Silouan is not a public defender of the faith against heresy, a polemicist. He theologizes for another motive:

> 'How shall I be silent concerning God when my spirit is consumed day and night with love for Him? [...] What shall I tell my soul? Hide within thyself what the Lord said? But all heaven knows about this. And I should be asked, "Wherefore did you conceal the Lord's mercies, and not declare them to men, that all might love God and find rest in Him?"' (p. 482)

We cannot dismiss what he says because it is simply, sometimes even childishly, expressed. First of all this is not the entire truth. We notice that he uses concepts that great philosophers grope to comprehend. Nor let us dismiss what he says because he is a son of the Church and follows the stream of its theological tradition – because 'there isn't anything original'. For how does tradition work? 'Even the souls of the heathen sensed that God is, though they were ignorant how to worship the true God. But the Holy Spirit instructed the prophets of old, and after them the Apostles and then our holy Fathers and Bishops, and in this wise the true faith came down to us' (p. 358). And what does 'in this wise' mean? Not 'if we read what they say', for he goes on to add: 'And we knew the Lord by the Holy Spirit, and when we knew Him our souls were confirmed in Him' (ibid.). Even if it were true that he wrote nothing original – and it is not – this 'confirmation' in itself is infinitely precious. It prevents tradition from becoming dead letter. If apostolic and patristic theology is confirmed by the experience of a contemporary in an age where even to remain Christian is a constant struggle against the flood of apostasy and despair, we have already been given a great gift in St Silouan. We have another John reassuring us that indeed God is love, in a world which makes us ask, as Fr Sophrony's foreword brings to light, 'Where is this Providence that is attentive to the last detail? We are all of us crushed by the spectacle of evil walking unrestrained up and down the world' (p. vii).

St Silouan was brought up in the Christian faith, and when he came to the monastery he was familiar with the Church and its teachings and services. Yet when he saw the living Lord, he ever afterwards described this event as the moment when 'the Holy Spirit gave me to know the Lord'. It is quite astonishing that someone who all his conscious life had heard and repeated the phrase 'Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit' should write that until then 'I did not know about the Holy Spirit' (p. 320). The knowledge of God which he claimed to have received, and which he shared in his spoken counsel and in his writings, came as a direct fruit of his vision at the mill when he was a novice. He says that it is 'incomprehensible' how the Holy Spirit shows himself. His theology was first of all a state of being that he was given to share with the Lord. It was many years later that he became a teacher, and only in his old age did he write his message 'for the people of the earth'.

We can feel the authority of experience behind his words. St Silouan writes with assurance because 'my thoughts are the fruit of long years of living' (p. 491). When he answered Fr Sophrony's theological enquiries or wrote notes about God, he was describing what he had seen and tasted and handled of the Word of God. 'The saints speak of that which they have actually seen, of that which they know. They do not speak of something they have not seen. They do not tell us, for instance, that they have seen a horse a mile long, or a steamer ten miles long, which do not exist' (p. 358). As a philosophical concept, a gnoseology, this sentence is worth at least one PhD's research. St Silouan's visitation gave him the immediate direct knowledge of truth without him needing preparation by an intellectual, conceptual study of truth or how man becomes cognizant of it. From him we learn that truth is known by *revelation to the humble-minded.* 'Pride is at the root of unbelief. The proud man would acquire knowledge through his mind and his studying, but it is not given to him to learn to know God, in that the Lord reveals Himself only to the lowly in heart.' The educated, and especially those with theological education, will not know God until they believe in their own ignorance. 'Both in heaven and on earth the Lord is made known only by the Holy Spirit, and *not through ordinary learning*' (p. 357). Athos is a theological academy *par excellence.*

St Silouan was utterly without speculative theological curiosity. He could not discuss dogmas abstractly. He could use theological language articulately, but he never spoke about God as an abstract subject, remote and theoretical. Every time he makes a theological statement he soon adds something about the spiritual effort or state needed to understand or keep the reality he refers to.

> Many philosophers and scholars have arrived at a belief in the existence of God but they have not come to know God. And we monks apply ourselves day and night to the study of the Lord's command but not all of us by a long way have come to know the Lord, although we believe in Him. To believe that God exists is one thing, to know God another (pp. 448–9).

Here is a paragraph that covers the contents of a year's lectures in the philosophy of religion.

Many theological themes are touched upon with a rare freshness and depth in his notes: triadology, divine love, prayer, creation, the Church, the Bible, etc. As far as love for man is concerned, in St Silouan we reach the summits of love and of teaching about love. This monk with no theological or philosophical background answered Fr Sophrony's question about universal love like this:

> To be one with all, as the Lord said, 'that all may be one', there is no need for us to cudgel our brains: we all have one and the same nature, and so it should be natural for us to love all men; but it is the Holy Spirit Who gives us the strength to love (p. 108).

In this sentence, down to the word 'but', is contained Orthodox anthropology in its fullness.

St Silouan wrote that pure, undistracted prayer is the fulfilment of the commandment to love God with all our mind (p. 143). This is just one example of a powerful new expression in the ascetic tradition of the Church. There are three features of St Silouan's theology that Fr Sophrony considered original. Originality does not mean a diversion from tradition, but a new form of expression and/or one that goes deeper into the heart of the matter. In my opinion St Silouan is original in both these senses.

[1] St Silouan describes the humility of Christ as of another kind than 'ascetic' humility, that is, keeping a lowly estimation of oneself.

> There are many kinds of humility. One man is obedient, and has nothing but blame for himself; and this is humility. Another repents him of his sins and considers himself loathsome in the sight of God – and that is humility. But there

> is still another humility in the man who has known the Lord in the Holy Spirit (p. 310).

Christ-like humility cannot be the same as self-condemnation for sin, because Christ is sinless. But St Silouan was not basing his comparison on dogmas learned 'from outside'. For one thing, he kept self-blame to a rare degree, so he knew 'by the taste' that it was not the same. Second, he knew that he had *lost* the Christ-like humility given to him as a sight and as a state in his vision.

[2] That love of our brethren is the test of how real and how deep is our love for God is taught directly by Christ[3] and the Apostles.[4] St Silouan shows us that the test of our knowledge of truth is our attitude towards those who offend us or persecute us, or are cruel to the Church. 'There are people who desire the destruction, the torment in hellfire of their enemies, or the enemies of the Church. They think like this because they have not learned divine love' (p. 275).

[3] St Silouan read the Holy Fathers, especially ascetic writers such as John Klimakos, Isaac, Makarios, the Desert Fathers, and others, and quoted from them in conversation and in writing. He recommended reading: 'O brethren, read more of the Holy Gospels, and the works of the Holy Fathers! Through such reading does the soul come to know God, and the mind becomes occupied with the Lord' (p. 416). He could compare his experience with what the Fathers said. He made the observation that when he read the Holy Fathers, he could tell what degree of inspiration lay behind the words. He measured the words uncritically, preferring to read Orthodox sources just for that reason. But at the same time he shows that words are measured by criteria other than authorship. Even the saints did not always write with the same inspiration. And the higher the degree of inspiration in the reader, the more discerning he will be of variations. No wonder Fr Tryphon said that St Silouan had reached the measure of the Holy Fathers (p. 251).

St Silouan's writings touch upon life in all its aspects, because everything can be done either in accordance with the Holy Spirit or not. Man's life is conditioned by his theology. Striving for virtue is a natural effect of the Holy Spirit's touch. 'We must urge ourselves all our lives to do good.' 'Think that God sees you, though you do not see him' (p. 490). St Silouan's advice goes from prayer – the spiritual level – to the psychological level, to the physical level, and all the time these levels overlap, as they do in real life.

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[3] e.g. John 13:35.

[4] e.g. 1 John 4:8, Eph. 4:15, Jas. 1:27.

> If you are irritable, or, as they say, 'nervy', that is a real calamity. Paroxysms or fits of mental anguish are diseases to be physicked with lowliness of spirit and repentance, and by loving one's brother and one's enemies' (p. 447).

[There, by the way, we have material for a few doctorates in psychology and manuals of psychotherapy...] Life cannot be separated from 'spiritual life'.

> How clear it is to me that the Lord guides us! Without Him we cannot even think a good thing. Therefore we must surrender ourselves humbly to the Divine will, that the Lord may direct us (p. 341).

If we put anything before the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God loses its place in our life. That is one of the key messages Athos gives the world. We have time only to glance at a few of the areas of life covered by St Silouan's notes.

In the world, seeking our path is often tied up with ambition. Once again, St Silouan shows us how to see reality.

> 'Everyone in this world has his task to perform, be he king or patriarch, cook, blacksmith or teacher, but the Lord Whose love extends to everyone of us will give greater reward to the man whose love for God is greater' (p. 296).
>
> In love towards God and our fellow-men [...] lie both freedom and equality. But with society as it is graded on this earth there can be no equality, though that is of no importance for the soul. Not everyone can be an emperor or a prince; not everyone can be a patriarch or an abbot, or a leader; but in every walk of life we can love God and be pleasing to Him, and only this is important (p. 343).

His love and prayer for those who offended him were sown in him by the Lord, and cultivated in his life among the brethren. 'Many of [the monks] disliked him. Some inveighed against him face to face, saying that he was "bewitched". Others would say, "Ugh, damned saint!"' Others misunderstood his praying for the persecutors of the Russian Church – and remember he had relatives in Russia. Athos reminds us of the adage that it is 'not so much the geographical location as the way of life' that sanctifies. As a geographical reality, Athos is uniquely valuable precisely because its space is reserved for Orthodox monastic life, but this is not conferred automatically on its inhabitants.

I will quote another counsel which is both deeply theological and eminently practicable by everyone: 'With all your might and main ask the Lord for humility and brotherly love, for to him who loves his brother the Lord giveth freely of His grace. Try yourself: one day ask God for brotherly love, and the next day live without love, and you will see the difference' (p. 426). Love may be expressed in simple ways. 'Often a single sympathetic greeting will work a happy change in the soul; while contrariwise, one unfriendly look – and grace and the love of God depart. When that happens, make haste to repent' (p. 427).

> I was walking along [...] when I saw a little four-year-old boy running towards me. [...] I had an egg on me, which I gave to the child. He was delighted, and ran off to show the present to his father. And for a little thing like that I received great joy from God, and took a love for every one of God's creatures, and my soul sensed the Divine Spirit. Reaching home, seized with pity for the world, I prayed long to God, weeping many tears' (p. 374).

Every encounter is a training ground for universal love. By the way, the sacrifice was not so 'little'; he was living in a monastery where the diet, as Fr Sophrony used to say, varied between rice with cabbage and cabbage with rice. The monks usually got an egg only at Easter.

St Silouan lived without forgetting the dimension of heaven. But in his advice to people in the world, and advice to monks about their everyday life, he writes about everyday matters with wisdom. Fr Sophrony said it was always as easy to talk to him about private and difficult matters 'as if you were discussing a recipe for soup'. As a monk he was asked about varied matters: what to study, how to pray for a missing daughter, whether a hieromonk living in the city should listen to music, and so on. His answers were not condescending –

indeed, they did not always make comfortable listening, for he encouraged the keeping of the commandments. He spoke about freedom to a student in a manner that Fr Sophrony considered 'too profound for the youth to grasp', but the student grasped enough to be 'deeply impressed' and had 'food for thought' for the future (p. 65).

To take another example: on the question of food, St Silouan is his own original self, combining a childlike honesty about his shortcomings with a depth of ascetic experience and understanding. A practical matter is dealt with in the light of the soul. 'After meals we should feel like praying – that is the measure of moderation' (p. 326).

St Silouan was taught compassion for all the creation. 'The Spirit of God teaches the soul to love every living thing so that she would have no harm come to even a green leaf on a tree, or trample underfoot a flower of the field.' 'Once I needlessly killed a fly. The poor thing crawled on the ground, hurt and mangled, and for three whole days I wept over my cruelty to a living creature, and to this day the incident remains in my memory.' St Silouan spoke and acted with deep sensitivity to the beauty of creation, but he was not sentimentally attached to God's handiwork. He scythed grass, ate fish, 'used' creation. Also, he was aware that heavenly beauty is so great that earthly beauty fades in comparison. 'The sweetness of the Holy Spirit surpasses all the delights [music, love, nature... these are just some of the "delights" he mentions he had known] of the world' (p. 466). In many other places he speaks of rapture in God to the point that the world is quite forgotten.

Between December 1904 and October 1905 St Silouan returned to his homeland, called up as a reservist at the time of Russia's war with Japan. He visited some monasteries; and on one train journey a fellow passenger, a shopkeeper, offered him a cigarette. Fr Silouan thanked him but did not take a cigarette. The man said, 'Probably, Father, you consider smoking a sin? But smoking helps in real life; it helps you to relax.' He continued trying to persuade Fr Silouan of the benefits of smoking, and finally St Silouan said, 'Before you light up a cigarette, pray, repeat an "Our Father".' The man answered: 'Praying before having a smoke somehow doesn't work.' To this Silouan observed, 'So better not start anything which cannot be preceded by untroubled prayer' (p. 70).

In an age where we are swamped with information it is salutary to hear what St Silouan has to say about knowledge and about information. 'Some there are who spend their whole lives trying to find out what there is on the sun or the moon, or in seeking like knowledge, yet this is of no profit to the soul. But if we take pains to explore the human heart [...]' (p. 355). 'With our minds we cannot come to know even how the sun is made; and if we beg God to tell us how He made the sun, the answer rings in our soul, "Humble thyself, and thou shalt know not only the sun but the Creator of the sun"' (p. 103). As far as 'news' is concerned, St Silouan said that he did not care for newspapers. 'Reading newspapers clouds the mind and hinders pure prayer' (p. 73). One of the monks said that hearing the news encouraged his prayer for others – certainly an admirable reaction. But St Silouan said: 'When the soul prays for the world she knows better without newspapers how the whole earth is afflicted.' When asked to explain, he said, 'Newspapers don't write about people but about events, and then not the truth. [...] You won't get at the truth by reading them; whereas prayer cleanses the mind and gives it a better vision of all things' (p. 73). Knowledge direct from God brings with it the strength for compassion. Information tires the brain and the spirit to no purpose. Words are allowed to float in and out of our mind without provoking effective compassion, edifying us, or even exercising our brains. We know that the news we hear at 7 o'clock will be updated at 8 o'clock. Athos absorbs all the pain of the world, but Athos and our culture are diametrically opposed means of picking up the world's vibes.

Extraordinary gifts of grace do not mean that God's chosen ones are preselected and everyone else is second class. The saints who received grace beg God to dispense it to all without exception. Grace, even etymologically, means a gift; and it is always a personal gift. Even had we the ability to discern measures of grace correctly, there is no sense in envying another person a greater measure of grace. What we can do is treat our one talent as another has treated his five. We have seen today what a true monk did with his talents. 'The monk prays constantly. Thanks to monks, prayer continues unceasing on earth, and the world profits, for through prayer the world continues to exist' (pp. 407–8). Most of the prayer on Athos remains 'in secret'.

When it is revealed, as in the case of St Silouan, together with a portrait of one who practised it to its ultimate degree, then we really do visit Mount Athos.

Further Reading

D. Beck, *Flames of Wisdom* (Minneapolis, 1994).
H. Boosalis, *Orthodox Spiritual Life according to Saint Silouan the Athonite* (South Canaan, PA, 2000).
Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Tolleshunt Knights, 1991).
——, *The Monk of Mount Athos* (Crestwood, NY, 1997).
——, *Wisdom from the Holy Mountain* (Crestwood, NY, 2002).
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NICHOLAS SAKHAROV

St Silouan the Athonite and Archimandrite Sophrony

Almost a century ago on Mount Athos an event took place that at the time could hardly have attracted anyone's attention. After a long and painful ascetic struggle, a simple monk came to a point when he felt an utter exhaustion of his inner resources and, unable to go on, he was plunged in despair. Then the word of the Lord came unto him – 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.'[1] Hardly literate, a peasant, this monk, whose name was Silouan, by his profound spiritual intuition nevertheless came to realize that this word would be an event that later would grow beyond the confines of his tiny Athonite cell, an event that for many Christians could mark the 'beginning of victory', the breakthrough towards universal love.[2] I would like to comment on this event, as it came to be associated with the names of two Athonites – St Silouan and his disciple Archimandrite Sophrony.

These words, 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not', became a starting-point of their spiritual contact. Fr Sophrony had his first serious encounter with St Silouan only about five years after his arrival in 1926 at the monastery of St Panteleimon. Once Fr Sophrony was visited in his cell by a Russian monk, Fr Vladimir, and the latter posed the question: 'Fr Sophrony, how can I be saved?' Fr Sophrony offered him a cup of tea and after a while replied: 'Stay on the brink of despair, and when you cannot go on, step back and have a cup of tea.' The following day Fr Sophrony met St Silouan in the monastery courtyard and St Silouan immediately asked: 'Fr Sophrony, did Fr Vladimir visit you yesterday?' Realizing what St Silouan had in mind,

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[1] Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Tolleshunt Knights, 1991), p. 42.

[2] Id., *Pisma v Rossiju* (Moscow, 1997), p. 29.

Fr Sophrony replied: 'Have I advised him wrongly?' St Silouan gently said: 'No. But what you said is beyond his measure. Come and we will discuss it.' It is then that St Silouan for the first time shared with Fr Sophrony his experience and the word of the Lord, 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.'

Their message, evolving from these words of Christ, has become a guide to many Christians of our epoch. Though it is difficult as yet to unveil the dimensions of its contribution to the future history of Christianity, nevertheless we may already observe how this message has had a world-wide appeal, and a visible impact on theology and other fields of human thought. In some ways it has become an epoch-making *kerygma*.

A Spanish theologian, P. de Luis, having read a book by Fr Sophrony, was struck by the unusual character of his writings. He notes in them a certain 'sello de lo auténtico' (seal of authenticity), and he continues: 'The reader will encounter life which has become theology and theology which has become life.'[3] Thus one of the important dimensions of St Silouan's teaching and that of his disciple is that they restore in our postmodern Christianity the primacy of the immediate, existential knowledge of God. St Silouan writes: 'It is one thing to believe in God, and another to know him.'[4] These simple words can no longer be taken as an expression of mere piety, of a simple peasant's devotion, and thereby dismissed by academic theology. Behind them there lies a long theological and philosophical development, which took place in Eastern Christian thought.

In the West, knowledge came to be traditionally understood as the process by which a subject is set over against its object. It was largely dominated by the Hegelian philosophy of the self-aware thinking mind: the further analytic reason detaches itself from its object, the deeper is its knowledge. Such a one-sided understanding of truth, as Andrew Louth notes, brought about a 'dissociation of sensibility' in Western culture.[5] Though this principle proved indispensable for scientific knowledge, it nevertheless has railroaded modern academic theology into promoting the so-called 'flight from experience', so much so that the experience of God becomes 'almost theologically illegitimate'[6] and the preserve of theology.

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[3] P. de Luis, 'Archimandrite Sophrony, Voir Dieu Tel qu'il est', *Estudio Agustiniano*, 3 (1984), 518.

[4] Archim. Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 87.

[5] A. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 45–72.

As a response to the gnoseology of the self-aware thinking mind, Eastern Christian thought has developed a philosophy of the knowing heart. In Russia it came to the forefront in the nineteenth century, notably with Ivan Kyrievsky. True knowledge is achieved not through 'objective' detachment (as in the West) but through 'subjective' participation, communion. This is articulated in depth by Bulgakov and Florensky, who do away with 'conceptual algebra' in cognition.

It is this Russian Orthodox model of knowledge that allowed Fr Sophrony to acknowledge St Silouan's ideas as having deep theological meaning. He would later postulate St Silouan's immediacy in the knowledge of God as a basic principle of theology. In his book *La félicité de connaître la voie* Fr Sophrony writes: 'Knowledge is conceived as communion in being, a sharing of life. True knowledge of God is only granted at the existential level by an experience lived with all our being.'[7] That is what lies behind the biblical idea of knowledge. The Hebrew verb *YADAH* (to know) implies the all-embracing range of communion.[8] Thus he invites us not to 'flee from experience' but to live personally every Christian truth, as he and his teacher did. Indeed, their very writings evolve as a result of an interactive dialogue with divine reality.

In the 1960s an academic theologian would inevitably have responded to such 'theology' with the question: 'Is it plausible to build theology as an academic discipline on one's personal subjective experience: wouldn't it turn simply into an expression of one's emotional preferences?'[9] Today, however, when religious philosophy has traversed through and left behind what one may call the agnostic deadlock, it admits more space for such a theology. Thus, for example, Richard Swinburne's theories of credulity and probability logically allow us to justify trust in mystical experiences: 'apparent perceptions ought to be taken at their face value in the absence of positive reason for challenge.'[10] Swinburne's argument furthers the developments in epistemology that go under the title of internalism.[11] The main argument of this trend of thought is that man can be justified in believing that his internal and subjective experience has an objective value.[12]

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[6] K. Bockmuehl, *The Unreal God of Modern Theology* (Colorado Springs, 1988), pp. 110, 112; cf. G. Griffith, *Interpreters of Man* (London, 1943), p. 221; A. Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, pp. 45–72.

[7] *La félicité de connaître la voie* (Geneva, 1988), pp. 30 and 25.

[8] On the biblical idea of knowledge, see I. Engnell, '"Knowledge" and "Life" in the Creation Story', *Vetus Testamentum*, Supplement 3 (1955), 103–19; cf. E. Baumann, 'YADAH und seine Derivate. Eine sprachlichexegetische Studie', in *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 28 (1908), 22–41, 110–43.

For the Orthodox, however, what provides the credit of authenticity to experiential theology is that the experience falls within the dogmatic vision of the Tradition of the Church. It is within this perspective that the meaning of every dogmatic affirmation within Christianity is to be perceived. St Silouan and Fr Sophrony remind postmodern theology that Christian dogmas are not the products of intellectual research. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.'[13] Thus for Fr Sophrony and St Silouan any church dogma is essentially the verbal expression, the description of this 'evidence': how the divine reality manifests itself to man. Fr Sophrony writes: 'Dogma places us before the "fact" of Divine Being without giving us rational explanations.' Thus, at the root of the dogmas there is a revelation, prior to their intellectual assimilation. 'When the spirit of man', Fr Sophrony continues, 'through faith, by inspiration from on High, is confronted by evidence of the *Supreme Fact* [...] it is precisely an experience of this kind which is at the foundation of dogmatic synthesis.'[14]

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[9] J. Lucas, 'Reason Restored', in W. Abraham and S. Holtzer (eds), *The Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford, 1987), p. 71.

[10] R. Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford, 1979), p. 275.

[11] For internalism in epistemology, see W. Alston, 'Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology', *Philosophical Topics*, 14, 1 (1986), 179ff.

[12] For the fuller account of this argument, see R. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1989), pp. 7ff.

[13] Heb. 11:1.

It is no coincidence that such an existential approach to theology emerged from within the ascetic life of Athonite monks. Monastic life is organized in a way that enables man to live the presence of this reality more profoundly. Everything is focused on prayer as a living communion with that reality, so much so that the divine encroaches upon man's daily life, shaping even its tiniest detail and thought, bringing theory and practice into a unified whole. It is on Mount Athos that Fr Sophrony became acutely aware of the vital interconnection between various aspects of spiritual life and dogmatic teaching, each element of which is indispensable. Thus he writes:

> There are three things I cannot accept: non-dogmatic faith, non-ecclesiological Christianity and non-ascetic Christianity. These three – the Church, dogma and asceticism – constitute one single life for me.[15]

From within such a context of living contemplation St Silouan's and Fr Sophrony's message provided an existential answer to many questions which the theology and philosophy of their time were preoccupied with. Today I wish to determine how the message 'Keep thy mind in hell and despair not' falls within the context of and provides solutions to the three main questions of contemporary Russian religious philosophy: (1) the idea of person, (2) the principle of unity, and (3) an ideal community.

'Keep thy mind in hell' and the idea of person

It would seem to be difficult to relate the words 'keep thy mind in hell' to traditional perceptions of personhood. To begin with, let us juxtapose this formula with the Cartesian concept of person, which was accepted in the West for centuries: 'Cogito, ergo sum' – 'I think, therefore I am.' If personhood is determined by man's capacity for analytical thinking, what does St Silouan's formula tell us? That we deny our mind, our faculty of thinking, our very personhood? This formula does not correspond to many modern attempts to define the person holistically – that is, in a way that would embrace the entire range of man's constituents: bodily and noetic. Such an approach emerged not least after Freud's and Jung's contribution, which enhanced the interest in the inner processes of self-awareness. They see a person as a natural product of physical processes. Both Freud and Jung limit their idea of person to various combinations of intra-psychic and interpersonal causality.

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[14] *La félicité de connaître la voie*, p. 24.

[15] *Podvig Bogopoznanija* (Moscow, 2002), pp. 270–1.

In Russian religious philosophy of the last two centuries, the idea of person emerges from within the dialectics of society. The Russians, notably Berdyaev, sought to reconcile two antitheses: society and the individual. Persona emerges as a synthesis of the two. Persona is a 'communal being', different from the individual, who is a self-contained unit. Bishop Kallistos Ware summarizes this difference saying that *individuum* is an atom (Greek: *atomon*) 'shut off from others, self-centred, isolated [...] a unit recorded in a census'. Persona [Greek: *prosopon*], on the other hand, while retaining this element of 'atomic ego' as a basis of being, is 'outward looking, in relationship, involved with others. Where *atomon* signifies separation, *prosopon* signifies communion.'[16] However there were various views about how and where 'person' realizes its true potential. Berdyaev saw the ultimate self-realization of man as a person in creativity;[17] others (like V. Soloviev, V. Rozanov, and finally P. Evdokimoff) in marital relationship.[18]

Fr Sophrony takes up this investigation into personhood. But having St Silouan's formula 'Keep thy mind in hell' as an implicit point of departure, he transposes the question on to a higher theological level. Let us now expound this connection.

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[16] K. Ware, 'The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity', *Sobornost*, 8:2 (1986), 7; cf. idem, 'The Mystery of the Human Person', *Sobornost*, 3:1 (1981), 64.

[17] See N. Berdyaev, 'Problema cheloveka', *Put'*, 50 (1936), 15; cf. idem, 'Personalizm i Marxizm', *Put'*, 48 (1935), 6.

[18] See V. Shestakov, 'Foreword', *Russkii Eros, ili Filosofija lubvi v Rossii* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 8ff.

Naturally, Fr Sophrony is driven and controlled not so much by philosophical considerations as by biblical revelation. In Genesis1:26 we read that God created man in his own image and after his own likeness. Furthermore, Fr Sophrony witnessed in St Silouan a living example of how the divine image realizes itself in human person. The first book of Fr Sophrony, *Staretz Silouan* (1948), is a theological portrait of the perfected persona. In his later books, *His Life Is Mine* (1977) and *We Shall See Him As He Is* (1985), he continues to work out his distinctive concept of the human person in close interconnection with the Orthodox dogmas about Christ and the Trinity. So important did this link become for Fr Sophrony that he writes in the foreword to his book, *Wisdom from Mount Athos*:

> The life of each and every Christian confession is conditioned at all levels by its conception of the Holy Trinity. Differences in theological interpretation of the principle of the Person-Hypostasis in the Divine Being constitute a watershed, a demarcation line, not only between the various religions but between the sundry Christian confessions too.[19]

What is important for Fr Sophrony in the concept of the Trinity for his understanding of persona? That God is love. Love is the principle of existence of the tri-hypostatic God. It is the principle of existence of each persona within the Trinity. This love manifests itself in the mutual co-inherence (*perichoresis*) of the persons of the Trinity. For each of them the content of life is the life of the other two persons. Thus the Father so loves the Son that he empties himself in his eternal generation of the Son, conveying unto the Son all the fullness of his being.[20] The Son so loves the Father that he empties himself and returns this fullness to the Father: he does nothing of himself[21] and in his incarnation as the very Word-Logos, he, as it were, becomes

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[19] V. Shestakov, 'Foreword', *Russkii Eros, ili Filosofija lubvi v Rossii* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 15–16.

[20] Cf. Col. 2:9, John 3:35, 5:20, 5:22, etc.

[21] John 8:28.

'wordless' of himself, turning himself into the Word of the Father[22] to the extent of the ultimate self-emptying in his death on the Cross. The Holy Spirit, mysterious Paraclete, never works for and of himself: he does the work of the Father and testifies for his Son.[23] The early Church sometimes rendered the name Paraclete as advocate, one who testifies for and defends the other, underlying thereby the selfless character of his hypostatic manifestation. And these three self-effacing persons constitute our Godhead – God, who is humility.[24]

Fr Sophrony summarizes it in his last book:

> There [in the Trinity] each *hypostasis* is totally unveiled to the others; where kenotic love is manifest as the basic trait of Divine Life because of which the unity of the Trinity is complete and absolute.[25]

Such triadology answers our question about what it means to exist as a person. For Fr Sophrony person is the opposite of *individuum*: the entire content of life of person is no not 'I', my 'Ego', but other persons – the object of its love. He therefore brings forth a succinct formula of persona, be it human or divine: 'Love transfers the existence of the person who loves into the beloved, and thus it assimilates the life of the loved one. So the person is permeated with love.'[26]

Christ's words to St Silouan express the same personal principle as I have just outlined above. 'Keep thy mind in hell' signifies the existential orientation proper to the hypostatic-personal existence, which is the existence of love – 'I love, therefore I am.' Love never seeks its own, but always lives by the other. There is no love without self-*kenosis*, without self-sacrifice, and we know that the deeper this *kenosis* and this sacrifice, the greater the fullness of love. Its ultimate measure is appointed by and manifested in Christ himself: 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'[27] 'Keep thy mind in hell' is this negation of 'self' in order to give space to 'other'. Thereby these words 'Keep thy mind in hell' have become an ascetic code which assists the realization of hypostatic principle in man.

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[22] John 12:49, 14:10.

[23] John 14:26, 15:26.

[24] Archim. Sophrony, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 43.

[25] Archimandrite Sophrony, *We Shall See Him As He Is*, trans. R. Edmonds (Tolleshunt Knights, 1985), p. 210.

[26] *La félicité de connaître la voie*, p. 21.

Yet they are not just an *ad hoc* injunction to an Athonite monk; they are also Christ's self revelation: on the one hand they express the way of Christ manifested in his life and in his 'work'[28] as Saviour; on the other they express the intra-Trinitarian life of each divine hypostasis, as we saw above.

This principle of self-belittlement and self-condemnation, 'Keep thy mind in hell', was already present from the very beginning, from the *arche*[29] of the Gospel. The 'Forerunner' of Christ, John the Baptist, has 'fore-run' the way of Christ when he declared: 'He must increase, but I must decrease';[30] and John indeed decreased himself so much that 'he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John'.[31] In other words his humility remains unsurpassed.

The same principle, 'Keep thy mind in hell', is contained within the commandments of Christ – the commandments which he himself fulfilled in all perfection. They express Christ's voluntary self-emptying. As Christ spoke of love to the point of self-hatred,[32] he manifested it in his existential hypostatic orientation. We see it in his 'not-I-but-the-Father' sayings: Christ lives by the Father, seeks his will, his glory, and so on.[33] With his words and actions he reveals such hypostatic 'love that seeketh not her own'.[34] Christ, though the incarnate God, avoids any 'divine action' of his own, so much so that the Father's hypostasis is manifest absolutely through the absolutely

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[27] John 15:13.
[28] John 17:4.
[29] Mark 1:1.
[30] John 3:30.
[31] Matt. 11:11.
[32] Luke 14 :26.
[33] John 6:57; cf. 5:30, 5, 43; 7:18, 15:15.
[34] 1 Cor. 13:5.

'transparent screen' of Christ's self-emptied hypostasis.[35] Through this *kenosis* it becomes the 'express image of the Father'.[36]

This existential orientation, 'Keep thy mind in hell, is manifested in many stories related by the Gospel. To point out just a few: when Christ was declared by the apostle Peter to be the Christ, the Son of God, the unoriginate and pre-eternal, Christ's existential response was to think rather of his passion and death: 'From that time forth Jesus began to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed.'[37] The same thought would become manifest in Jesus's words whenever he was praised for his miracles.[38] When he was anointed with precious ointment, in an act proper to royal dignity, he thought in that moment of his burial.[39]

To sum up, Jesus followed up the principle he himself commanded: 'If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all',[40] for 'he that shall humble himself shall be exalted'.[41] So, 'He humbled himself'[42] indeed and God the Father has exalted him, granting to 'Jesus the Man'[43] not only a resurrection but also 'a name which is above every name [...] to whom every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth'.[44] To the Ephesians St Paul formulates Christ in this way – he descended first into the lower parts of the earth and only then ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.[45]

He received the fullness as man as well, opening up to universal dimensions and sending his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the whole universe, to all the nations.[46] Fr Sophrony sees in this 'all nations' a most vivid expression of universalism pertaining to the perfected persona.

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[35] *La félicité de connaître la voie*, p. 44 (cf. John. 14:9).

[36] Heb. 1:3.

[37] Matt. 16:15–21.

[38] Mark 9:31.

[39] Matt. 26:7–12.

[40] Mark 9:35.

[41] Matt. 23:12

[42] Phil. 2:8.

[43] 1 Tim. 2:5.

[44] Phil. 2:9–10.

[45] Eph. 4:9–10.

In an analogous way the realization of hypostasis is seen in St Silouan. He writes: 'I began to do as the Lord taught me',[47] and through this existential orientation controlled by the principle 'Keep thy mind in hell' he experienced the state of Christ-like humility. It is a perfect state of kenotic love when self is entirely abandoned. And in a way similar to that of Christ, through this utter *kenosis* he reached the utter fullness of being. In a Christ-like universality, he embraced in his prayer the whole Adam, all mankind: 'O Lord, send down Thy Holy Spirit on earth that all nations may know Thee.'[48]

'Keep thy mind in hell' and the principle of unity

I turn to my second point: how these words are related to the idea of pan-unity, which is a leitmotif of the Russian religious mind.

From the nineteenth century onwards Russian religious thought manifests an intense exigency to work out a philosophical system that would see the entire universe, its divine and created realms, as one integral whole. Thus the theme of the *vseedinstvo*, pan-unity, preoccupies such philosophers as Soloviev. Unity, as a principle, becomes a controlling feature of his philosophical system. His concern is to disclose the principle of unity behind existing reality, the principle that would lead creation to God and thereby to its integrity and realization. Soloviev and his followers, Florensky and Bulgakov, bring forward the teaching on divine wisdom – *Sophia*. The divine wisdom is seen as the basis of communion between the human and divine worlds. It opens up the possibilities for the transfiguration of the material world. Divine wisdom is that principle in the universe that

[46] Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47.

[47] *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 431.

[48] Ibid., p. 276.

moves towards God, towards integration, towards beauty, towards harmony.[49]

And what do we see in St Silouan? It would not be a gross exaggeration to say that the aspirations of Russian philosophy received an adequate contribution in the living example of St Silouan. He has demonstrated that persona is that principle that moves the created order towards integration, beauty, and harmony. Once again the model of the Trinity is at work. There the personae express themselves in its mutual *kenosis* so much so that the unity of the Godhead is absolute. Similarly this principle applies to the human persona. The formula 'Keep thy mind in hell' serves as a spiritual engine towards this unity. We may explain how it works in Paul Tillich's terms: it is a radical shift of the ultimate existential concern from the finite 'self' towards the infinity of all that is 'not-I', of created and uncreated realms. In its love towards God, other human personae, and the created order, persona empties itself, by plunging its ego into non-being, and thereby receives in itself all that is, all that is not-I. Fr Sophrony writes:

> The attitude of love is natural for the *persona* made in the image of God of love. He does not determine himself oppositively, by contraposing himself over against the 'not I'. Love is the most intrinsic content of his essence. Embracing the whole world in prayerful love, the *persona* achieves *ad intra* the unity of all that exists. In the creative act of his becoming, he aspires to universal unity *ad extra* also. In love lies his likeness to God Who is Love.[50]

Thus persona evolves as a vital link, a principle of unity, which the Russians had being trying to work out. The supreme example and model (*hypodeigma*)[51] for all created personae is the uncreated persona of Christ which assumes two natures, thereby two worlds – created and uncreated. By his incarnation he made manifest that 'natura humana capax divini', that our nature can 'support', as it were, the infinity, the infinite mode of being. In St Silouan we observe this

[49] A. Litva, *La 'Sophia' dans la création selon la doctrine de S. Bulgakoff* (Rome, 1951); B. Newman 'Sergius Bulgakov and the Theology of Divine Wisdom', *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 22 (1978), 39–73.

[50] *We Shall See Him As He Is*, pp. 196–7; cf. *His Life Is Mine* (Oxford, 1977), p. 43; cf. 1 John 4:16.

[51] John 13:5.

Christ-like universality and even infinity of human persona. His living example forced Fr Sophrony to see in the human persona a God-like *centrum*. Persona unifies all that is by virtue of taking all into itself:

> The Creator of the world, the Lord holds all that exists in the palm of His hand; and man as hypostasis is a kind of centre capable of containing in himself not only the plurality of cosmic realities but the whole fullness of Divine and human being.[52]

Such anthropological maximalism constrained Fr Sophrony to search for an adequate terminology. He feels that the traditional patristic idea of man as a microcosm in the Cappadocians and in Maximos[53] does not adequately reflect the fact of the infinity and transcendentality of man. He goes further – man is more than microcosm: he is a *microtheos*.[54] Using Fr Sergei Bulgakov's expression, Fr Sophrony boldly writes: 'In the creation of man God repeats himself.'[55] Divine infinity is set thereby as an ultimate potential of human being. Such a maximalist dimension is appointed for us by Christ himself: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'[56]

All these grandiose words, 'infinity', 'God-like universality', 'the whole Adam', are far from being abstract notions. For St Silouan,

[52] *We Shall See Him As He Is*, p. 197; *His Life Is Mine*, p. 43.

[53] On the microcosm in Gregory of Nyssa, see P. Gregorios, *Cosmic Man. The Divine Presence* (New Delhi, 1980), pp. 12–23; W. Volker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker* (Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 51ff.; J. Cuesta, *La Antropología y la Medicina Pastoral de San Gregorio de Nisa* (Madrid, 1946), pp. 53ff.; in Gregory of Nazianzus (see *Or.* 28. 22): T. Spidlik, *Grégoire de Nazianze. Introduction à l'étude de sa doctrine spirituelle* (Roma, 1971), pp. 104ff.; A. Ellverson, *The Dual Nature of Man: A Study in the Theological Anthropology of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Uppsala, 1981), pp. 38ff.; in Maximos: L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund, 1965). On the general background of the term, see R. Aller, 'Microcosmus, from Anaximandres to Paracelsus', *Traditio*, 2 (1944), 319–407; G. Cogner, *Theories of Macrocosmos and Microcosmos in the History of Philosophy* (New York, 1922), esp. pp. 29–52.

[54] *His Life Is Mine*, p. 77; *We Shall See Him As He Is*, p. 194.

[55] *We Shall See Him As He Is*, pp. 192–3.

[56] Matt. 5:48.

it is a living reality which expresses itself in prayer for the whole world, for the whole Adam as he liked to say. It is no coincidence that Fr Sophrony put the prayer for the whole world as a goal of monastic strivings, furnishing it with a sound theological explanation. In prayer for the whole world human persons are united by love in a similar manner to the persons of the Trinity:

> Lively experience of the *Persona* is rarely given to people here below. It comes by praying like Christ for the whole world as for oneself. Led to such prayer by the workings of the Holy Spirit, man existentially lives the image of the Triune God. In this kind of prayer one experiences the consubstantiality of the human race. Such prayer reveals the ontological meaning of the second commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mt. 12:31). All Adam becomes One Man – mankind.[57]

It is then that the human potential comes to its realization:

> Drawn towards prayer for the whole world by the Divine Spirit [...] we suddenly see in ourselves the miracle of God: within us rises a spiritual sun – *persona* [...] By this we perceive [...] the Revelation of the Hypostatic Principle within the Trinity [...] God is one in the threeness of *Personae*.[58]

'Keep thy mind in hell' and an ideal community

Here I come to my final point. Mount Athos gave spiritual birth to St Silouan and Fr Sophrony and their teaching 'Keep thy mind in hell and despair not.' Through them it made a substantial contribution towards the contemporary revival of monasticism. Through them Mount Athos was able to put the issues of ascetic theology back on the academic shelves. Their teaching serves as an adequate answer to the anti-monastic tendencies in Christianity of the last few centuries. Since the Reformation the idea that monks and nuns must renounce 'the world' has made a number of people regard the monastic estate as something sombre and uncomfortable. Here is an interesting example from an eighteenth-century book:

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[57] *We Shall See Him As He Is*, p. 203.

[58] Ibid., p. 195.

> The notion of making the height of virtue, and the perfection of human nature to consist in solitude and contemplation, is the most extravagant of all the unreasonable doctrines fanaticism and ignorance have ever conceived. A doctrine the most absurd in speculation, and productive of greatest evils in practice. A doctrine repugnant to the frame and constitution of man subversive of every relative duty, destructive to human society. And contradictory to the first great law of God.[59]

This opinion became quite widely accepted among Russian religious thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and found its ultimate expression among people of the so-called 'new religious consciousness', such as D. S. Merezhkovsky (1865–1941), N. Berdyaev (1874–1948), and V. Rozanov (1856–1919).[60] They regarded monasticism as a perversion of human existence, as a limitation of one's being, and ultimately as negation of life which is the greatest gift of God. And above all it contradicted their ideas of human society and its evolution. Generally speaking, theirs was a time of philosophical transition from Marxism to idealism. Within this wide spectrum of sociology Russian thinkers tried hard to work out the correlation of society and individual. For Berdyaev, as for many others, there remained an insoluble contradiction. In a Marxist or communist society, as it was understood, person is swallowed up by community. Its antithesis is anarchism, where community is suppressed by individual. But whatever the strategies were, the philosophy failed to work out the idea of community which would provide a perfect self-realization of man as persona.

It is therefore striking that the answer to their intellectual study should come from monasticism – from a 'stone which the builders refused'.[61] In St Silouan and Fr Sophrony the formula 'Keep thy mind in hell and despair not' came as an unexpected solution to how one can reconcile communal and personal existence. 'Keep thy mind in hell' is a principle of kenotic love by which persona realizes itself in relation to other fellow humans. St Silouan the Athonite used to say, 'Our brother is our life.'[62] For him the presence of divine grace was above all manifested in the relationship towards others: 'Grace proceeds from brotherly love, and by brotherly love is grace perceived.'[63]

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[59] J. G. King, 'Of the Office of Taking the Monastic Habits', *The Rites and Ceremonies of the Greek Church, in Russia; Containing an Account of Its Doctrine, Worship, and Discipline* (London, 1772), p. 361.

[60] P. Bori, 'La nuova "conscienza religiosa" e i circoli filosofico-religiosi', in *Movimenti religiosi in Russa prima della rivoluzione (1900–1917)* (Brescia, 1978), pp. 114ff.

In Fr Sophrony this vision receives a firm dogmatic ground. He builds up the idea of human community on the prime model of God the Trinity. He writes:

> the monastic community sets out to achieve unity [...] in the image of the oneness of the Holy Trinity [...] each one of us in some sense within his own hypostasis, is the centre of all [...] There is no one greater, no one lesser.[64]

'Keep thy mind in hell' emerges as a valuable precept of how to build up the community. Abiding by these words a monk sets the utmost priority of other personae over his own 'self': 'My "I" is last in the community.' The others (not I) are my life. Fr Sophrony writes that in the monastery 'all that one has and his whole self, he surrenders to each and all.'[65] However this self-renunciation, *kenosis*, is not a dissolving or annihilation of a person, as Berdyaev would think, but in fact its realization, just as in the hypostases in the Trinity their absolute *kenosis* ensures their absolute fullness. The monastic community serves as a starting-point from which the monk progresses from love for a few people, his brethren, to love in which he eventually embraces the whole world.

Just as in the Trinity there is no one-way love, for love is mutual, so in the monastic community this self-emptying of each member is not a one-way movement. Each person somehow is the centre of the community, the focus of existential concern for all and each. Such mutual *perichoresis* becomes the strongest bond of unity in the community. It is expressed above all in prayer:

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[61] Ps. 118:22.

[62] *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, p. 47.

[63] Ibid., p. 372.

[64] Archimandrite Sophrony, 'Zaveshanie', *Rozhdenije v Tsarstvo Nepokolebimoje* (Tolleshunt Knights, 1999), p. 187.

[65] Ibid.

> Everyone, bearing in his prayer all the members of the Community, strives to achieve what the commandment sets before us: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'– that is, as 'one's own' life.[66]

A. Khomyakov was one of the first of these Russian thinkers to see in love the bond of unity among Christians as a reflection of the love in the Trinity.[67] Though his idea does not extend far beyond ethics, it became widely accepted among Russians, who understood it in different ways. Here I may recall a story from Fr Sophrony's youth in the 1920s. When Fr Sophrony had already made up his mind to leave his artistic career in Paris and to dedicate his life to God, he was once visited in his studio by a lady who was interested in art. She somehow gathered what his intentions were, and said in a rather enigmatic way: 'Oh, Monsieur Sakharoff, comme il est difficile d'être saint! Il faut être gentil avec tout le monde toujours. Mais il y en a beaucoup de gens si désagréables!'

Fr Sophrony, on the other hand, speaks of brotherly love in a way that goes far beyond ethical and moral categories: he speaks of it in terms of ontology. The commandment of Christ, 'Love your neighbour as yourself',[68] manifests the profound consubstantial unity of the entire human race. It leads mankind to singleness of being.[69] Monasticism, which sets such a goal, emerges as a model of an ideal society, ideal in the deepest sense of the word: it is built on the divine ideal where communal and personal existences are reconciled in harmonious unity.

Fr Sophrony used to repeat that he sees his community as a small model of the whole of mankind. If we learn how to live together in love and unity with just one person in this community, it means we learn how to live together with millions of similar persons. As such, monasticism may work as a pattern for all units of our society to follow, be it family, or any other form of community, of group, of association...

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[66] Ibid., pp. 187–8.

[67] A. Khomyakov, 'Tserkov odna. Opyt katichizicheskogo izlozhenia uchenija o Tserkvi', *Sochinenija bogoslovskije* (St Petersburg, 1995), p. 39.

[68] *La félicité de connaître la voie*, p. 21; *His Life Is Mine*, p. 30.

[69] *His Life Is Mine*, p. 29.

'Monasticism', he writes to David Balfour, is a form of love.'[70] Such monasticism is seen at the forefront of this universal movement towards real unity – unity in God, as the most effective way towards the realization of the consubstantiality of all mankind. As for 'other' monasticism, in one of his talks Fr Sophrony points out: 'If monasticism does not teach us to love, it would be impossible to find justification for its existence.' The further the monk progresses in self-renouncing love for his neighbour as for himself, the deeper within he realizes the whole human race is one – the whole Adam – the single man-mankind. Through this *kenosis* the human hypostasis is called, as Fr Sophrony puts it, 'to achieve the fullness of god-manhood', 'to become dynamically equal to humanity in the aggregate', just as the divine hypostasis is to the whole Trinity.[71]

As a result, the monastic life evolves as the fullness of being in every respect. I believe that precisely this 'pleromatic' view of monasticism has inspired all those who embarked on the ascetic way under the influence of Fr Sophrony's word. In his writings they see how monasticism becomes a perfect way to the realization of the image and likeness of God in man, of humanity in the most profound sense of this word.

At the end of his last book, *We Shall See Him As He Is*, Fr Sophrony compares the significance of St Silouan's words 'Keep thy mind in hell and despair not' with that of Einstein's equation: $E = mc^2$. This equation laid the foundation for contemporary science and technology. In an analogous way St Silouan's formula opened up a matchless spiritual resource. Its relevance may be appreciated ever more deeply today, when in the world of confusion many search for spiritual consolation. These words remind us of the paradoxical nature of Christianity, which goes beyond the confines of human rationality.

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[70] *Podvig Bogopoznanija*, p. 250.

[71] *His Life Is Mine*, p. 29.

Where life is reached through death,[72] victory through defeat,[73] where glory shines in dishonour, where, as St Silouan and Fr Sophrony taught, might reveals itself in humility, where the road to fullness is through emptiness, and as Bishop Simon Barrington-Ward,[74] reading Fr Sophrony, rightly noted, where 'the wholeness comes through brokenness'. Without this it would be impossible to discover that life which Christ brought to men: which is 'life more abundant'.[75]

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ARCHIMANDRITE EPHRAIM

Elder Joseph the Hesychast: A Universal Image of Holiness

Monasticism is not an invention of men; monasticism is a way of life – one that aspires to the realization of evangelical perfection. 'If you want to be perfect […] come and follow me',[1] Christ admonishes. Not everyone, however, is able to follow Christ and live as he lived on earth. 'All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given.'[2] The monastic life has been delineated and passed on in a detailed and precise manner throughout the ages, providing all the appropriate prerequisites, so that with sure steps and without fear of harm a monk of any era may arrive at perfection, find fulfilment as a person, and realize his personal sanctification.

In his renunciation, a monk does not leave the world because he hates the world, but because he is drawn by the Holy Spirit to have a more complete contact and union with him. St Gregory Palamas has said that for this divine union 'the lover of divine intercourse' (the monk, that is) abandons the life of earthly liabilities and chooses the monastic way of life.[3] The monk tries to throw off the worldly way of thinking because, as St John says, 'If anyone loves the way of the world, the love of the Father is not in him.'[4] The monk is not a person who has his head buried in the sand or who is antisocial. One might say that the true monk is actually more social than those living within society, because he directly 'socializes' with God. Through 'in-Christ' love and prayer, he participates in the afflictions of the world and beseeches God to pour forth his mercy on all the people of the earth. In this way he lives out true universality and ecumenicity.

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[1] Matt. 19:21.

[2] Matt. 19:11.

[3] Gregory Palamas, 'In Defence of the Holy Hesychasts' 1.3.46; P. Christou (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: Correspondence*, vol. 1 (Thessaloniki, 1962), p. 457 (in Greek).

[4] See 1 John 2:15.

Throughout its more than one-thousand-year history, Athos – the bearer of saints – has brought forth innumerable holy ones. In this present paper we shall speak not only about the way of life and the teaching of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, but also about the ecumenical dimension of his person. The blessed elder lived for approximately forty years on the Holy Mountain and serves as a contemporary proof that Athos does not cease to carry out its work, the creation of saints. These are universal saints, who through their shining lives and grace-filled teachings influence our entire Church, which through them is praised, illumined, and glorified.

Elder Joseph was born in the village of Lefkes on the island of Paros in 1898. He was preordained 'from his mother's womb' to follow Christ and to become his co-worker for the salvation of the people. After his birth his mother saw in a vision an angel taking the baby away from her. When she protested, the angel showed her a decree written in a book indicating that, no matter what, he must take the baby.

At the age of about twenty-three he had a vision in which he was called by the heavenly King to serve at his palace. This caused him to think constantly about God's eternal kingdom and to compel himself into all kinds of ascetic and spiritual labours in the area of Penteli and in the mountains surrounding Athens, where he happened to be living at the time. Thus, following a short period of testing, he renounced the world and went to the Holy Mountain with a longing to live the ascetic life. He was a man of extraordinary physical stamina and strong-willed valour; he became a man of prayer. The gift of unceasing mental, or *noetic*, prayer was given to him by the most holy Virgin Mary while he was still a novice monk. He practised fasting, vigil, and prayer to the extreme. During the period of Great Lent, he would eat about 75 grams of flour per day, which he would boil with a little water and salt. For the rest of the year, a small tin can served as a measure for his daily quota of food. Throughout the first eight years of his asceticism, he did not sleep on a bed; he simply took a little sleep sitting on a stool. He kept a nightly vigil of prayer until near dawn through to the end of his life. His daily practice – besides his other spiritual duties – was to say the Jesus Prayer with his *nous*[5] and heart for six consecutive hours without any mental distraction. He worked diligently to maintain the sobriety and watchfulness of his *nous*. This spiritual practice led him to self-reproach and self-awareness, and to an intense, fervent prayer of repentance. His *nous* was frequently caught up into the *theoria* and vision of the Uncreated Light of God.

By the world's standards, the blessed elder was illiterate and uneducated; yet he was divinely taught and became wise in God. He had a living experience of divine grace: its initial visitation and its withdrawal ('divine abandonment', according to Elder Sophrony of blessed memory), as well as its return as a permanent and palpable presence during the final spiritual stage.

Elder Joseph was found worthy on several occasions to see angels. Once an angel gave him the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, something that we encounter quite rarely in the lives of the saints. Another time, on the feast of Theophany, three angels appeared to him. They censed and blessed him while chanting, 'As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, Alleluia.'

The elder had that which the saintly Elder Paisios would later call 'spiritual television' – that is, the gifts of discernment and clairvoyance, though he placed greater importance on the discernment of spirits, which he characterized as 'salt' for the life of the monk.[6] Elder Joseph's biographer, our own Elder Joseph of Vatopedi – who was blessed to be his disciple – told us that on numerous occasions he had to stay for a relatively long time at some far-off place of work for the needs of the brotherhood. When, at times, he found himself in distressful circumstances, the blessed elder would send him a letter explaining what was happening, why it was happening, and what the outcome of the ordeal would be. The elder would receive information about the interior state of others, even though they had not spoken to him. Likewise, he often discerned the heterodox that approached him, without having conversed with the person.

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[5] *Nous* here meaning the spiritual faculty of rational beings by which they see and experience both the physical and the spiritual world. Sometimes translated as 'mind', 'heart', or 'intellect'.

[6] Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Mount Athos, 1999), pp. 132–3.

Elder Joseph had a fervent love for the Lady Theotokos. At the mere mention of her name, he would weep out of divine yearning and a chaste desire for her. He had a direct contact with our All-Holy Lady; he knew her – as he himself used to say – with her dual attribute as Virgin Mother.[7] Usually following harsh trials and periods of great afflictions, the Mother of God would reveal herself in order to console him. She would continually remind him: 'Didn't I tell you to place your hope in me? Why are you disheartened?'[8] Once in the chapel of St John the Baptist in the caves of Little St Anne's skete, the Theotokos appeared to him in front of her icon on the icon screen. She was at her full stature, alive and full of light. She said to the elder, 'Here, take Christ', but in his modesty he did not make a move. Then the divine infant caressed the blessed elder with his hand three times on his forehead and on the top of his head.[9] Another time, after some great distress, he saw Christ on the cross within a profuse, divine light. Christ then said to him, 'Behold how much I suffered for you.' And as the elder himself recounted, 'All my afflictions dispersed like smoke.'[10]

The elder's death was a holy one. Several days before his repose, he had already been informed by the All-Holy Virgin that she would take him on her feast day. On the eve of the Dormition, the falling asleep, of the Mother of God in 1959, Mr Sotiris Schoinas, a well-known publisher of ecclesiastical books from Volos, passed by to see him. The elder told him, 'Tomorrow, Sotiris, I am leaving for the eternal homeland. Remember my words tomorrow when you hear the bells toll.'[11] Indeed, after the vigil of the Dormition of Our Lady Theotokos – a few hours after having partaken of the sacred mysteries saying, 'provisions for eternal life' – he peacefully gave up his soul into the hands of him whom he had longed for and served from his youth. He was just sixty-one years old, but from his great asceticism and hardships, and the various illnesses he suffered towards the end of his life, he appeared to be a very old man. Rather than causing sorrow and grief for his disciples, the death of the holy elder spread a sense of resurrection. While his appearances since his death to his spiritual children are numerous, he also appears to others who do not know him, bestowing divine consolation and making known to them the will of God.

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[7] Ibid., p.149.

[8] Ibid., p. 149.

[9] Ibid., p. 150.

[10] Elder Joseph the Hesychast, *Monastic Wisdom*, Letter 37 (Florence, AZ, 1998), p. 199.

[11] Ibid., p. 25.

Let us take, however, a few moments at this point to look into his teachings, so that we may see, even if only to a small degree, the depths of his spirituality, which proceeded from his exceptional experiential state of living in Christ.

Elder Joseph never had the chance to receive a 'secular' education, not even a basic one. He completed only two years of primary schooling. This is readily apparent in his handwritten letters. Being, however, a possessor of the fullness of divine grace, he succeeded, through the divine illumination of his grace-filled *nous*, in ascending to a high level of empirical theology, and he was shown to be a master theologian. Theology, according to the blessed elder – and generally according to all the holy fathers – is a fruit of the 'divine grace within us'. Relative to this, the elder writes:

> When through obedience and hesychia a monk's senses have been purified, his nous has been calmed and his heart has been cleansed, he then receives Grace and enlightenment of knowledge. He becomes all light, all nous, all lucid. He overflows with so much theology that even if three people were to start writing down what they were hearing, they could not keep up with the flow of Grace coming out in waves, spreading peace and utmost quiescence of passions throughout the body.[12]

We know that true theology is a gift of the Holy Spirit and not simply an academic education and training. This is why the monasteries are regarded by the holy fathers as the 'universities of the desert'. The letters of the blessed elder are theological treatises, even with their lack of literary elegance. Exploring these letters, one readily

[12] Ibid., Letter 48, p. 240.

comprehends, even if only as 'in a mirror dimly', the great measure of grace with which this triumphant Athonite monk was adorned.

The blessed elder was a great spiritual struggler and a fervent practitioner of interior watchfulness and sobriety. Throughout his entire life, he had the Jesus Prayer as a continuous recollection. Every evening, as we mentioned before, his rule was to occupy himself with the Jesus Prayer, keeping guard over his heart, for six consecutive hours. He himself reveals precisely this in one of his letters. 'I would sit for six hours in prayer and would not allow my nous to leave the heart.'[13] This method of his spiritual exercise – as discussed in discourses of the discerning fathers – indicates significant development of the person's spiritual and mental abilities and a high spiritual state. This is because it is something quite rare, especially in our days, for the *nous* of the person praying to remain undistracted in prayer within the heart for such a long period of time.

The elder had received from God a charismatic state of prayer – a pure prayer of the *nous* and heart. The union of the *nous* with the heart is an esteemed and desired state for the ascetics. The elder writes that 'as soon as the *nous* enters the heart, immediately its darkness is cleared, and straightaway it becomes peaceful and calm. It rejoices, is sweetened, rests, and is cleansed.'[14]

As the spoils of his perpetual spiritual warfare, the elder acquired self-reproach and tears as a permanent state. In his particular manner of expression, he emphasizes that to be humble-minded the ascetic must arrive at self-blame, at the awareness that he is a nought and that God is everything for him.[15] This is a humility based on the awareness of how inclined we are to evil and how easily we give in to it, but at the same time on the awareness of our high calling from God – that we have received the gift of adoption, that we are able to become gods by grace.[16] According to the elder, the earmark of true humility is tears, which generate a greater degree and sense of mental prayer, and which bring about the indwelling of divine grace in the body as well.[17]

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[13] Ibid., Letter 37, p. 194. See also Letter 25, p. 137.

[14] Ibid., Letter 55, p. 261.

[15] See Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Elder Joseph the Hesychast*, 4th Greek edn. (Mount Athos, 2001), pp. 335–7. [Editorial note: This book also exists in an English translation (see above, n. 6) which, however, omits a section entitled 'The Twelve Trumpets'. In this essay Archimandrite Ephraim only cites the Greek edition when he alludes to 'The Twelve Trumpets'.]

The monastic life leads the ascetic to his desired goal: the living experience of divine grace. How much the elder loved, how much he desired, how much he spoke about divine grace, its qualities, its coming, and its illuminating mysteries! He did not speak intellectually about this inexpressible gift of God, by which the direct communion of God and man is made possible. Moved by divine grace, and from within his own personal experience, he writes with surety and authenticity:

> Divine grace, according to my own participation in it, is understood by the sense of the spirit, as borne witness to by those who have known and seen it. It is the radiance of divine brightness, sensed in *theoria* and with lucidity of the *nous*; a subtlety of the intellect; a fragrant and sweet breath; undistracted prayer and the cessation of thoughts; an immaculate and perfectly peaceful life; as well as humble, calm, purifying, illuminating, joy-creating, and free of every fantasy! At that blessed moment there is no place for the slightest doubt in the recipient to think that perhaps it is not divine grace, as he is free of every suspicion or fear about it.[18]

Filled with divine grace, the elder experienced true and enduring *theoria* – the *theoria* of created beings and things, of Paradise, of the glory of the saints, the self-emptying of God the Word. As he himself writes,

> These *theorias* come one after another. It is not a matter of fabricating fantasies in one's nous, but the state is due to the action of Grace which brings thoughts, and then the nous occupies itself with *theoria*. Man does not fabricate them, but rather they come by themselves and seize the nous into *theoria.*[19]

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[16] See Joseph the Hesychast, *Wisdom*, Letter 17, p. 112.

[17] Ibid., Letter 5, p. 59.

[18] Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Hesychast* (Greek edn.), p. 270.

[19] Joseph the Hesychast, *Wisdom*, Letter 10, p. 84. *Theoria* (lit., 'seeing'), in its spiritual sense, is the vision or perception with the *nous* of the things of God, by which grace bestows upon man divine knowledge and *charismata*. Sometimes translated as 'contemplation'.

But it is a *theoria* that is as the 'rapture of the nous, cessation of the senses, stillness, profound silence of the bodily members, and union of God and man into one'.[20] The ascetic experiences this divine union through the vision of the Uncreated Light.[21] According to the elder, this Divine Light is profuse, extremely clear, and incomparably whiter than the material light, the light of day. It is a light of the *nous*, immaterial, formless, colourless, joyful, calm.[22] Participating in it, the person sees this truly Uncreated Light as above every whiteness and imaginable subtlety, while his entire being is flooded by the glory of the Divine Light.[23]

The Orthodox ascetic life has dispassion as its aim. A monk, through obedience and through diligence in observing all the commandments of God, aims at attracting divine grace, which will cleanse his heart from the passions in order for Christ 'to dwell and to walk'[24] within it. Elder Joseph writes in another letter:

> Labor now while you are young, so that you reap the fruit of dispassion in old age. And not in ripe old age, but in twenty years you will see what I am telling you, if you exert yourselves [...] And you will see the passions completely immobilized and will enjoy such peace of soul as if you were in Paradise.[25]

The blessed elder always placed faith before reason. He was characterized by an absolute trust in God's providence, even for the smallest and most insignificant things. He continually stressed this, saying: 'Where is God? God always helps. He always arrives at the right time, but patience is necessary.'[26] He reckoned patience in tribulations as a basic precondition for the coming of grace. He used to say,

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[20] Ibid., Letter 35, p. 182.

[21] For characteristic experiences of the hesychast elder relative to the Divine Light, see Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Hesychast*, where during its appearance either it bestows the charisma of noetic prayer (p. 43), three angels cense him (p. 54), he is caught up into Paradise (p. 76), he sees the Mother of God (pp. 97–101, 156), or an angel gives him Holy Communion (p. 103).

[22] See Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Hesychast* (Greek ed.), p. 318.

[23] Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Hesychast*, p. 99.

[24] See 2 Cor. 6:16.

[25] Joseph the Hesychast, *Wisdom*, Letter 12, p. 92.

[26] Ibid., Letter 40, p. 213.

'At the end of an exhausting patience, grace perceptively appears.' He placed importance on neither the pleasant nor the grievous things of this present life as true events in themselves; rather, he viewed everything through the prism of eternity. This attitude of his, as well as his entire supernatural way of life, should serve as an example for contemporary man, who lives encaged by the rationalism and humanism that characterize our present age.

The elder saw God everywhere. He even had a reverence for the irrational creation and looked on it as an active means of glorifying God. He wrote the following to someone who intended to visit the Holy Mountain:

> After spring it's beautiful here – from Holy Pascha until Our Lady's day in August. The beautiful rocks theologize like voiceless theologians, as does all of nature – each creature with its own voice or its silence. If you bump your hand against a little plant, immediately it shouts very loudly with its natural fragrance, 'Ouch! You didn't see me, but hit me!' And so on; everything has its own voice, so that when the wind blows, their movement creates a harmonious musical doxology to God.[27]

Although Elder Joseph was an extreme hesychast, he considered the great virtue of obedience to be the foundation for the monk. He said that when the monk is clothed in the habit of the schema at his tonsure, he also puts on obedience, and seeks to imitate the obedience of Christ.[28] 'The burden of obedience is considered to be the summation of the rest of the virtues, just as the cross is of the Lord's passion.'[29] For laymen living in the world, however, he admonished them to practise noetic, or mental, prayer. He believed that even the faithful living in the world could taste the fruits of the Jesus Prayer and obtain great spiritual benefit, if they would maintain a daily programme of saying the prayer.[30]

Through his life experience, blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast had become a sure and discerning guide for those 'desiring to be saved'. He was a master professor of the 'science of sciences and the art of arts' – that is, of monastic living and asceticism. To a young man who had asked him about the Jesus Prayer, he wrote:

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[27] Ibid., Letter 57, p. 270.

[28] Ibid., Letter 29, p. 151.

[29] Ibid.

[30] See *Wisdom*, Letters 1 and 2, pp. 39–46.

> The information you seek does not require time and effort for me to think and respond. For mental prayer is to me as any other man's trade is to him, because I have been working at it now for more than thirty-six years.[31]

Aware of the elder's practice and high spiritual state, many Athonite monks and numerous laymen would visit him seeking his counsel about this work of the *nous* and heart, as well as about other matters, and he gladly gave it to them. He writes concerning this offering: 'People come from various monasteries and sketes of the Holy Mountain, and by God's Grace, we tell them whatever the Lord enlightens us to say.'[32] The holy elder's benefaction was not only within the Holy Mountain, nor only within Greece, but extended worldwide. As he himself relates:

> These days I am constantly writing to those asking questions. This year people came from Germany solely to learn about mental prayer. From as far as America, people write to me with much eagerness. There are also many from Paris who are earnestly seeking.[33]

Of course, while he was still here in this life, they had communication with him and sought his spiritual guidance. Now, however, that he is in heaven, he has the opportunity to seek out those in need who request his aid, wherever they may happen to be. Thus, when recently he appeared to a spiritual child of his who happened to be in Hawaii, and the bewildered man asked, 'But Elder, are you here, too?' he replied with a smile, 'Now I go everywhere, my child.'

Elder Joseph lived in a period of decline for Athonite monasticism, and in general, for all of Orthodox monasticism. Of course, one could still find monks of great holiness on the Holy Mountain, but they were very few. Moreover, in a vision that Elder Joseph had when he was still a young monk, angels brought him to the front line to fight the demons that were in the opposite camp, and there were only one or two other monks there with him.[34]

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[31] Ibid., Letter 1, p. 39.

[32] Ibid., Letter 18, p. 115.

[33] Ibid., Letter 2, p. 45.

Through his empirical way of life, the holy elder reintroduced the teachings of St Gregory Palamas regarding hesychasm to contemporary Athonite monasticism and to Orthodox monasticism as a whole. His teaching was on a level with the teachings of the neptic fathers of the *Philokalia* such as Sts Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, Hesychios the Priest, Theoleptos of Philadelphia, Nikephoros the Monk, Gregory of Sinai, John the Carpathian, Mark the Ascetic, Peter of Damascus, Maximos the Confessor, and Symeon the New Theologian. The writings of St Isaac the Syrian were also always close to his heart.[35] Elder Joseph's presence as a genuine exponent of the neptic patristic tradition led to an influx of novices to monasticism; through his presence, a significant number of the monks today on the Holy Mountain renounced the 'life of cares' and followed 'the unfettered monastic way of life'.[36]

The former abbot of the holy monastery of Simonopetra, Elder Aimilianos, who embraced the teaching of Elder Joseph the Hesychast and transmitted it to his numerous spiritual children, has this to say about him:

> Blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast is a boast for recent Athonite history. In difficult times, he revived the age-old experience of hesychasm and prayer on Athos. Through painstaking and unceasing asceticism, and the spiritual guidance and instruction of his children, the elder trained a new generation in the practice of the ever-flowing Jesus Prayer, radiating outwards beyond the borders of Greece.[37]

George Mantzaridis, Emeritus Professor of Theology at the University of Thessaloniki, regards Elder Joseph the Hesychast as a torchbearer for the revival of contemporary Athonite monasticism.[38] Constantine

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[34] Ibid., Letter 37, p. 194.

[35] See Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Elder Joseph the Hesychast and the Patristic Tradition* (Mount Athos, 1997).

[36] Gregory Palamas, 'In Defence', vol. 1, p. 457.

[37] Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Hesychast* (Greek edn.), p. 15.

[38] George Mantzaridis, 'Saint Gregory Palamas in History and the Present', from the published proceedings of the International Scholastic Conferences of

Cavarnos, the Greek-American Byzantinist, was so taken by a discussion he had with the elder in 1958 that he wrote, 'He impressed me as a genuine mystic, a true saint.'[39]

When we met Elder Sophrony at the monastery of Tolleshunt Knights in Essex and mentioned Elder Joseph the Hesychast to him, he exclaimed, 'I had met him, and I felt that I was standing before a spiritual general.' Another elder from Athos told us that, when he met him, it was like an earthquake resulting from the power of the blessed elder's prayer. Blessed Elder Paisios told us how disappointed he was that he was not able to realize his desire to meet Elder Joseph while he was still alive. When venerable Elder Cherubim, founder of the monastery of the Holy Paraclete in Oropos, Attica, was living at the skete of St Anne, he said that the brotherhood of Elder Joseph the Hesychast was the spiritual vanguard of the skete. Another saintly father, blessed Ieronymos from the island of Aegina, nurtured a special piety for the elder following their one meeting.

While Elder Joseph was living in the caves of Little St Anne's, Mr Ioannis Bitsios from Ouranoupolis paid him a visit at the time when the elder had acquired his three disciples: Elder Joseph of Vatopedi, Elder Ephraim, former abbot of Philotheou, and the ever-memorable Elder Haralambos, former abbot of Dionysiou. Mr Bitsios asked the elder whether those three young monks were from his brotherhood. Elder Joseph prophetically replied: 'Ioannis, do you see these young monks? One day, they will fill the Holy Mountain with monks.' And indeed today, the brotherhoods of six of the twenty holy monasteries on Mount Athos, as well as many other communities, both of men and of women, within and outside of Greece, have their parentage in blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast. Within Mount Athos, the monasteries of Vatopedi, Dionysiou, Xeropotamou, Karakalou, Philotheou, and Konstamonitou have abbots who are spiritual grandchildren of the holy elder. There are also many cells and houses

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Athens and Lemesos, *Saint Gregory Palamas in History and the Present* (Mount Athos, 2000), p. 58, and George Mantzaridis, *Person and Institutions* (Thessaloniki, 1997), p. 178 (in Greek).

[39] Constantine Cavarnos, *Anchored in God*, 2nd edn. (Belmont, MA, 1975), p. 206.

of the Holy Mountain that have elders with immediate spiritual kinship to the elder, such as the cell of St Ephraim the Syrian at Katounakia. The former elder of this house, the ever-memorable Fr Ephraim of Katounakia, considered Elder Joseph as his actual elder and 'teacher'. Likewise, spiritual grandchildren of the elder are now themselves elders and spiritual guides for many male and female monasteries in Greece. In Cyprus, the Metropolitan Bishop of Limassol, Athanasios – another spiritual grandson of blessed Elder Joseph – is also the elder for the monastery of Machaira, as well as for several women's monasteries. In North America, Elder Ephraim, the former abbot of Philotheou monastery, and one of the disciples of the blessed Elder Joseph, has founded sixteen monasteries and convents – the chief one being the holy monastery of St Anthony in the desert of Arizona, which indeed has become a spiritual oasis for the American people.

It is estimated that more than 800 monks and nuns have their direct 'root' in Elder Joseph the Hesychast. Because he foreknew this, Elder Joseph did not allow his disciples to live together after his death, but separated them. He knew that they would become the abbots and elders of great coenobia.

The elder's love for monasticism has also been apparent following his death. To this day, he has appeared to young people that we know, urging them to follow the monastic way of life. He has appeared to many monks, consoling them in times of affliction and speaking with them about spiritual matters. In one moving incident, he appeared to a young woman who wanted to become a nun. Her parents, however, reacted in a most dreadful way. The girl was in college in Thessaloniki, and when she returned to her family home in Athens for Christmas, her parents, having learned of her desire to become a nun, beat her so badly that they had to take her to the hospital because of her profuse bleeding, a broken arm, and broken ribs. One cannot describe the poor girl's psychological state. She cried and sobbed continuously. That evening, however, the door of her hospital room opened and Elder Joseph entered, asking her why she was so distressed. He told her, 'Don't be afraid; be patient a bit longer. The Mother of God will call you near her', and then he vanished. In the end, everything unfolded just as the elder had foretold.

The blessed Fr Justin Popovich used to say that the essence of Christianity is monasticism, and that when there is a regeneration of monasticism, there will be a regeneration for the whole body of the Church. A virtuous monk of Kiev named Parthenios, when he received the monastic great habit, asked our All-Holy Lady to reveal to him its significance. The Mother of God appeared and told him that 'the monk is an intercessor praying for the whole world.' [40] It is exactly in this prayer for the world wherein lies monasticism's great offering to the world.

Elder Joseph dedicated the greater part of his life to praying for the world. Freed from the bonds of the passions and having become 'pure in heart', he was rendered a vessel of grace in which prayer was active for the salvation of the world. He felt and participated in the pain of all humanity, and with his prayer he would raise this pain to the throne of God, so that every afflicted person might find release. Just before the beginning of the Second World War – as the elder himself told his disciple, the ever-memorable Elder Haralambos of Dionysiou – he felt an unbearable pain in his heart, where such a flame had been lit that it was like a fiery furnace. This pain and flame drove him to incessant prayer. He was unable to do anything else. He was compelled to lay aside all his other activities and to pray intensively throughout all twenty-four hours of the day as never before. He had understood that something gravely serious was happening; afterwards, he was informed of the beginning of the war. [41] How many were to be saved, I wonder, and how much evil would be restrained – because the formidable results of the war could have been even more disastrous – by the holy elder's prayers? He prayed not only for those in manifold afflictions who were still in this world, but also for the souls of the reposed. He had such powerful and effective prayer that, by God's grace, he drew souls out of hell.[42]

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[40] Archimandrite Sophrony, *Practice and Theory* (Tolleshunt Knights, 1996), p.252 (in Greek).

[41] See Monk Joseph of Dionysiou, *Hieromonk Haralambos of Dionysiou* (Mount Athos, 2002), p. 252 (in Greek).

[42] Ibid., pp. 157–8.

The perfect monk willingly shoulders mankind's responsibility for the evil that exists in the world. He places himself below all men, and even below all creation, and he feels that he is the worst, the most sinful person. From the depths of this self-reproach, he solicits the mercy of God for all his creatures, because he feels responsible for the afflictions and the sinfulness of the human race. Through his 'prayer of Gethsemane', he acquires the spiritual state of Christ. Just as Christ bears within himself all humanity, so the monk broadens outwards, embracing the whole world; he unfolds as a true person and becomes universal, after the image of Christ's own universality. [43] We know that even today such monks exist, who have devoted their life to prayer for the sake of the world. And how greatly, in these days of ours, all mankind is in need of their prayers for the difficult times it is passing through!

'Sometimes', the biographer of the blessed elder writes, 'I would see him in acute distress and ask what was the matter, and he would reply with anguish that some person we knew was suffering and was asking for help.'[44] He could not hear about something distressing a brother without weeping, without praying for him. He would ask Christ not to put him in Paradise unless he first put that brother there, unless he first bestowed his consolation on the brother. Love and a heartfelt desire for the spiritual benefit of his neighbour held him captive. This love broadened his heart to such a degree that it could encompass every human being. His whole being had been enlarged by prayer for the world. Although he was very strict – one might say merciless – towards himself, he showed great sympathy and compassion for his neighbour. This is a particular characteristic of a genuine Orthodox ascetic.

His love for his neighbour compelled him on numerous occasions to appear and help the faithful even after his death. As a typical example, there was a woman from Crete whom the Jehovah's Witnesses had enticed through their false teachings to renounce her Orthodox faith. One night, the elder appeared in her home and began to catechize her; afterwards, he presented her before Christ. She then understood 'by the grace of the Holy Spirit' the singular truth that is found in the Orthodox Church. The next day the woman spotted a photograph of the elder in a bookstore. She was told that it was Elder Joseph the Hesychast and that he had reposed many years earlier.

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[43] Many holy fathers of the Church are characterized as 'universal'. See the *kontakion* hymns for St Ephraim of Syria and St Silouan the Athonite.

[44] Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Hesychast*, p. 131.

The elder, however, has also appeared to well-intentioned persons of other Christian confessions. It was the beginning of Great Lent in 2001 at the holy monastery of the Holy Archangels near San Antonio, Texas. David, a man of Baptist Protestant upbringing employed by the monastery, was preparing his tools for removing trees when he felt that someone was looking at him. He looked up the hill and saw an 'older monk with a grey beard'. He was holding a staff in his right hand and a silver cross in his left, and was smiling at him. He also noticed that the monk's habit and beard were blowing in the wind. David turned back to his preparations, but suddenly realized that there was not even the slightest breeze blowing. He looked back only a second or two later to discover that the monk was nowhere to be seen. Later, when the monk who usually directed him in his tasks passed by, David related what had happened and asked who the elderly monk was, since he had never seen him before. The monk replied that there were no elderly monks at the monastery. The monk went to the abbot, Fr Dositheos, and repeated what David had told him. The discerning abbot sent the monk and others back with icons of saints and with photographs of various elderly monks, one of whom was Elder Joseph the Hesychast. David directly identified the elder as the monk he had seen, and was astonished by the subsequent explanation of who the monk was. David has now become a catechumen of the Orthodox Church.

Athonite monasticism in its real dimension, even in these last days that we live in, is both a signpost to heaven and a bridge over which pass true spiritual provisions for the world. Holy Elder Joseph, through his blessed life according to God's will, has left us an example of ascetic Orthodox genuineness. Through his grace-filled asceticism, he stripped himself of the 'old man', who corrupts with his deceptive desires and practices,[45] and put on 'the new man, after the likeness of God'.[46] Thus he was shown to be a true person, who by divine grace embraces all of creation and all people. Following and living out the Athonite tradition, he achieved his personal sanctification and bears witness throughout the entire breadth and length of the earth, both to monastics and to laymen, that 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.'[47] For this reason, we believe it fitting to hymn him with the refrain, 'Hail, O universal Father.'

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[45] See Eph. 4:22 and Col. 3:9.

Further Reading

C. Cavarnos, *Anchored in God: Life, Art, and Thought on the Holy Mountain of Athos*, 2nd edn. (Belmont, MA, 1975).
P. Christou (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: Correspondence*, 5 vols. so far (Thessaloniki, 1962–).
Joseph of Dionysiou, *Hieromonk Haralambos of Dionysiou* (Mount Athos, 2002).
Joseph of Vatopaidi, *Elder Joseph the Hesychast and the Patristic Tradition* (Mount Athos, 1997).
——, *Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles – Experiences – Teachings*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Mount Athos, 1999); 4th edn. in Greek (Mount Athos, 2001).
——, *Obedience is Life: Elder Ephraim of Katounakia* (Mount Athos, 2003).
Joseph the Hesychast, *Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast* (Florence, AZ, 1998).
G. Mantzaridis, *Person and Institutions* (Thessaloniki, 1997).
H. Middleton, *Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit: The Lives and Counsels of Contemporary Elders of Greece* (Thessaloniki, 2003).
Saint Gregory Palamas in History and the Present (Mount Athos, 2000).
Sophrony, Archimandrite, *Practice and Theory*, in Greek (Tolleshunt Knights, 1996).

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[46] See Eph. 4:24.
[47] Heb. 13:8.

ARCHIMANDRITE ELISAIOS

The Spiritual Tradition of Simonopetra[1]

This discussion of the 'spiritual tradition of Simonopetra' will not be a history of the monastery – known already by many – nor will it refer to the creation of some Athonite 'school of spirituality'. Rather, I shall present but a few details of our life: details that are easy to recall because they bear a certain significance, they are new, and they are quite moving. Someone once said – and the saying is surely true – that memory tends to capture reminiscences by tastes and smells. What we have tasted, what we have smelt, we will remember with more intense clarity than if we had simply described various stages, or testimonies, of the history of the monastery.

I shall not demean the Holy Mountain or Simonopetra by describing either as a place that has admirably preserved Byzantine culture – a distinguished museum that conveys to us the images of an exalted past. Instead I shall concentrate on what is much closer to the lives of each and every one of us, whether on or apart from the Mountain: the image of the monk that struggles, who suffers to preserve holiness as a living tradition.

Père Placide, in a talk entitled 'The Holy Mountain and Europe', made a very pertinent comment that I would like to reiterate here:

> The cultural and intellectual pursuits of the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon monks, who disseminated the Gospel throughout north-western Europe, were significant and of noteworthy influence. However, this entire external activity sprang forth from a mystical source, which was the intense inner life of those monks:

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[1] This chapter was first published in *Sourozh*, 90 (2002), 1–14, and is reprinted here with the editor's kind permission.

> 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all those things will be added unto thee.'[2]

If the monasteries referred to by Père Placide produced such a radiance; if, because of them, medieval Europe fashioned itself into an outstanding focal point of civilization, watered by the values of the Gospel, it was not, in the first instance, because their monks copied manuscripts of Virgil and Ovid, opened schools, built basilicas, or produced finely carved jewellery. It was because some men, striving to dominate their passions, to be irrigated by the spirit of the Beatitudes, thereby attained to that mystical peace of the heart which neither art nor science can confer. The familiar aphorism of St Seraphim of Sarov always resounds in our ears: 'Establish peace in your soul and thousands around you will be saved.'[3]

In Byzantine times, of course, it was not necessary for the monks to undertake such an extensive array of cultural and educational enterprises. However, they held deep within themselves the sense of the mystical presence of the Lord. Spiritual tradition, therefore, means a living remembrance, mystical and sacramental, of the life of the saints: a taste and a feeling, a palpable contact with the life of the fathers, with the image of God in man, the place, the sweat, the books, the garments, the written word.

There is certainly only one tradition. There is however a variety of local and personal expressions of this tradition. As someone once wrote: 'All things in the life of Orthodoxy are a type of the Holy Trinity.' One monastery may be quite different from another, but all monks acknowledge that they are first and foremost Athonites: men who willingly withdrew from the world, from their families, from their fatherland, from their former life, in order to become adopted children of the Mother of God. The most striking feature of Athonite monasticism is that it constitutes one large spiritual family whose progeny recognize the obligation that they have towards their ancestors, their elders of the past, whom they customarily refer to as 'grandfathers'. This sense of spiritual legacy is of paramount importance. If for over one thousand years the mystical tradition of the Holy Mountain has been preserved unimpaired, this is because the principal concern of the monks has been to maintain, to assimilate, and to cultivate such a legacy. Asserting this tradition has nothing to do with a cult of personality, whether static or fundamentalist, as certain people who impose upon Orthodoxy alien models and criteria that are currently 'in vogue' maintain. Rather, this zeal is life itself, the continuity of life, indeed the passing on of authentic life. In the monastic tradition, authentic spirituality is lived out personally. It is assimilated freely by each person, wherever there is a community.

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[2] P. Deseille, 'Mount Athos and Europe', in A. Golitzin (ed. and trans.), *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain: Contemporary Voices from Mount Athos* (South Canaan, PA, 1996), p. 94.

[3] 'Life of Saint Seraphim of Sarov', in *The Synaxarion* 3 (2 January) (Ormylia, 2001), p. 579.

Within the limits outlined above, then, what precisely is the living, spiritual tradition of Simonopetra?

The topos: the very rock upon which the monastery stands

Our monastery is neither the oldest nor the most important of the Athonite houses; but for us it is the most remarkable, of commanding significance both as regards its edifice and its location. Suspended between heaven and earth, it resembles a tower that increases in height each day, or a boat that has been cast into the sea and is tossed by the waves. Both images are symbolic of the monastic life which, according to St John Klimakos, is 'a permanent constraint on nature.'[4] It is a rock, akin to a pillar, rivalling the peak of Athos at the tip of the peninsula, transporting its monks 'to another existence':[5] to heavenly realms. Our monks are fortified by this stronghold in order to complete an ascent, to conquer the beloved and awaited Kingdom of God. The walls of the monastery do not shield horizons; on the contrary, in a mysterious manner they open the windows and gates of heaven.

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[4] St John Klimakos, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Brookline, MA, 1978), p. 4.

[5] *Pentekostarion*, Easter Kanon, Ode 7.

This highly challenging setting is the first feature of the life of the monastery – something that both subjects and is imposed upon the monks. You need to have made a decision to become something of a stylite in order to live such an unwelcoming and unvaried life on top of this rock. And this *is* a challenge, a brave adventure with great rewards.

The cave of St Simon, founder of our sacred monastery

The cave of our monastery's founder, St Simon, is a blessing for the monks, a place of repose and solace. Virtually all of the monasteries on Athos have been graced by the presence of a cave, and Simonopetra is no exception. This means that all of them had the hesychastic life as their fundamental starting-point.

St Simon lived at the end of the thirteenth century. He was an anchorite whose cave, whose dwelling, was – and still is – located directly opposite the monastery. You are no doubt aware that the history of monasticism on the Holy Mountain began with hesychasts, and in spite of the establishment of great imperial monasteries, Athos's hesychastic character has always been preserved. Our saint spent his life there in his cave: a harsh life, but one that was free from anxieties. He endeavoured to concentrate all the strength of his soul and to have no connection with the outside world, in order to soar up to heaven by prayer. As much as he withdrew into that narrow and damp grotto, so did his soul open up to the consolation and the freshness of heaven. St Simon left behind for us the living legacy of the ascetic life, the determination to seek God. This godly man, a prototype to be emulated, personifies for us that tradition which, ever since his day, has been transmitted from generation to generation. In this way the vision, our mindfulness of St Simon's cave and of his spiritual combats undertaken for the love of God, remains to this day the point of departure, the precondition, and the context of the life of a Simonopetra monk.

The light of New Bethlehem

Totally absorbed in noetic prayer, St Simon received, one Christmas Day, a divine vision of the star of Bethlehem, which he saw resting above the very rock where the monastery stands today.[6] This detail is fundamental to the life of the monastery and its brotherhood: the establishment of Simonopetra is a direct consequence of this revelation of God in light.

God is light and within his light he reveals himself, not only eschatologically but also mystically. Numberless are the experiences of the Uncreated Light by ancient and more recent Athonites. This experience of the glory of God, as expounded by St Gregory Palamas, remains the measure of Orthodox monasticism.

St Simon did not accept the divine revelation without testing or doubting it; but he became convinced that it was indeed from God after hearing a celestial voice that exhorted him to build a monastery on the rock, to be dedicated to the nativity of Christ and to be named 'New Bethlehem'. The light of God as revelation stands as the orienttation of our life, but it presupposes a complete suppression of any self-centred expectation of a vision. Together with the other saints who were made worthy to see God in his light, St Simon had reached beforehand a blessed state of despondency, a lack of confidence, about his own spiritual powers.

God appears only to the humble and poor in spirit – those who persevere in their own place and have as their sole enterprise the work of being seen by God, of offering themselves to him as an empty vessel, at the ready to receive heavenly manna by God's grace. According to Elder Aimilianos, 'Only by standing here and being seen by God can I appreciate my unworthiness, believe in my unworthiness, realizing that in this hopeful state of hopelessness I shall see God.'[7]

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[6] 'Life of Saint Simon the Outpourer of Myrrh' in *The Synaxarion* 2 (28 December) (Ormylia, 1999), p. 579.

[7] Synaxis of the fathers at Simonopetra, 1980.

The coenobium

St Simon's vision of the light was not only a revelation of God's glory as a reward for his ascetic struggles, but also the point of departure for the establishment of the monastery. The erection of a coenobium on the rock was closely bound up with the command to abandon the solitary life. Thus, filled with divine zeal and love for his brothers in Christ, St Simon took leave of his stony abode and raised the sky-treading monastery, sealing it with the cave-moulded character of his life. Even today the monastery is a complex of caves. Pay attention to the following sequence: the ascetic labours of St Simon; the good pleasure of God and the appearance of the light as a reward for Simon's struggles; God's command for Simon to renounce the hesychastic life of the cave and to endeavour to transfer it to a community on the rock.

The establishment of the coenobium of Simonopetra, therefore, as with so many other monasteries in both the East and the West, has as its beginning the revelation of God as light. The monks also have received from their holy founder the promise that, gathered together in one place, they will be made worthy, here and now, to delight in the glory of God. To us St Simon the hesychast has left as a legacy the understanding that life in community is light; it is the experience of the Church as a mystery, projected visibly from the world to come.

We, the spiritual children of St Simon, both the senior monks and the newer, follow in his footsteps and after his example. It is our bounden duty to bring to fruition a synthesis of the joyful dwelling together of the fathers and an intense yearning in silence for God; that yearning which one of the most ancient texts of the monastic tradition refers to as 'an expectation of Christ's Advent in hymns'.[8] As our Elder Aimilianos teaches us: 'The monks do not abandon the world and their fellow men, but rather leave behind the turbulence of the world in order to build a new community, a co-habitation of God and men, an imprint of the New Jerusalem.' This is their *diakonia*, their service, for the Church. They live together, in one and the same place;

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[8] A.-J. Festugière (ed.), *Historia Monachorum in Aegyptio* (Brussels, 1971), p. 5.

they cultivate a distinct manner of living, a way of appreciating that fellowship articulated by the words of the elder who preserves the common mind of the tradition of the holy Orthodox fathers: 'Only when I assume this manner of thinking, when I accept it and cultivate it, do I then sense in the assembly of the fathers the palpability and the nearness of God. Thus do I live daily in the light and for me all things appear as new.'

The spiritual heritage bequeathed by St Simon to his spiritual children is composed of a promise and a hope: that they will be able to taste of the fruits of the hesychastic life and of inner prayer within the common assembly. And this promise is the strongest bond in life for the regeneration and the advancement of the monastery; it is also the chief characteristic of the present brotherhood. Throughout the stages of the monastery's history, adherence to this tradition ebbed and flowed, but it was never forgotten. In the fourteenth century St Gregory of Sinai, a great beacon of monasticism and an eminent teacher of inner prayer, regularly set off to the vicinity of Simonopetra to practise quietude and avoid the crowds of his admirers.[9]

St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain testifies indirectly to the fact that the fathers of Simonopetra read the manuscripts of St Gregory Palamas on hesychasm and inner prayer, for they had copied and handed them over to him for publication. Unfortunately this edition never saw the light of day, as it was destroyed in a Viennese printing house.[10]

The arrival at Simonopetra in the eighteenth century of St Paisy Velichkovsky together with his disciples – fifty monks from the skete of the Prophet Elijah – revived the hesychastic tradition of the monastery. Regrettably, they were hounded by Thessaloniki's money-lenders who demanded settlement of the debts of the monastery, which had been forced to close as a result of mounting economic problems. The monks were unable to find the funds and within a few months they left.[11] However, the sojourn of St Paisy at our monastery was a notable blessing, of which we are reminded in a contemporary wall painting in the refectory, where the saint joins company with the founders and holy men who have sealed the life of the monastery. His image there underscores, as does the special order of service composed by one of our monks (chanted in the saint's honour each year on 15 November), the contribution of St Paisy to the restoration of the hesychastic tradition and of inner prayer. This stopover at Simonopetra instigated the saint's departure for Romania where, as is well known, he founded at Neamţ and Secu in Moldavia an enormous community of a thousand monks which became the centre of dissemination of the hesychastic and 'Philokalic' tradition throughout the Slavonic lands.

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[9] 'Life of Saint Gregory the Sinaite', *The Synaxarion* 4 (6 April) (Ormylia, 2005), p. 353.

[10] C. Cavarnos, *St Nicodemos the Hagiorite*, Modern Orthodox Saints 3 (Belmont, MA, 1979), p. 83.

Many adventure-filled centuries for the monastery elapsed until, in our own day, a revival of the vision and the life of St Simon was begun by our elder, Abbot Aimilianos. As you know, 1963 was the millennium year of the Holy Mountain. Grand celebrations were held, even though the situation on Athos appeared to be desperate. Many felt that it would not be long before the Mountain would suffer harm and be turned into a museum. Only a few monks thought otherwise, knowing that the mystical tradition could never be lost. These were ascetics and cenobitics, such as the Elder Joseph the Hesychast, St Silouan, Ioakeim of the skete of St Anne, Athanasios of Grigoriou, Kallinikos the Hesychast, Elder Abimelek, Daniel of Katounakia, Nikon of Karoulia, Isaak of Dionysiou, Savvas the Confessor, Ignatios the Confessor, Kodratos of Karakalou, Philaretos of Konstamonitou, Gerasimos Menagias, Fr Paisios, Ephraim of Katounakia, and so many others. They remained hidden but, like sparks beneath the ashes, they continued the tradition of the fathers in silence and obscurity. In this way a miracle was being prepared on the Holy Mountain. But this would occur only after the passing of a few years.

Elder Aimilianos, since childhood – 'the Lord knows' how and why[12] – dreamt of spending his years in a living relationship with

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[11] 'Life of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky', *The Synaxarion* 2 (15 November) (Ormylia, 1999), p. 150.

[12] Cf. 2 Cor. 12.2.

God. With the blessing of Bishop Dionysios of Trikkala, he found himself at the venerable monastery of St Vissarion, located in a forested region of Thessaly. This monastery, still active today, is home to an exceptional brotherhood under Elder Ignatios, himself a spiritual child of our elder. At that monastery Fr Aimilanos was granted a revelation of the monastic life, or rather, a profound mystical experience: the light of God, which inundated him at the hour of the Liturgy. Henceforth his every Divine Liturgy, prepared for by a long vigil, was a sublime experience of God's glory, a mystagogy, reminiscent of the decisive revelatory events that sealed the history of the people of Israel. (He describes this in a nebulous fashion in one of his addresses.) As a result he resolutely made up his mind to partake of the ascetic tradition rather than to assume ecclesiastical duties in the world.

The metropolitan had faith in Fr Aimilianos, and so in the early part of 1960 he charged him with the abbacy of the monastery of the Transfiguration at the Meteora. The example and the frugal lifestyle of the elder lured many of us to the cliffs of that place. There may only have been a few fathers at the monastery, but the number of the elder's followers increased day by day. We, pupils at the local schools, fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen years of age, frequently ascended the Meteora on foot in order to see the elder, to hear his words, to join in the vigil services and in the liturgical life. As a result, a monastic flame of great intensity blazed within us. Men and women, clergy and laity, from all over Greece, and a few from abroad, came to visit the elder, and indeed many of them, each one in a personal way, received his assistance.

The times we spent at the Meteora monastery are now the subject of our nostalgia: our childhood enthusiasm for the feats of the saints, our condemnation of earthly matters, the dignity of the worship, the joy of the spiritual life. Even now, with emotion there resound in our ears the elder's ceremonial exclamations, such as the 'Peace be to all' of the Liturgy, the prayers of the hours, the midnight office, and compline. There we learned the church services, the Psalter, matins, vespers, the hours, compline. There the ascetic writings were to be found in the same knapsack as our school texts. There we envied the lives of the two Sts Athanasios: the one of the Meteora and the other of the Holy Mountain. There on that rock we dreamt about the peak of Athos and the wildernesses of St Antony and St Paul the Simple. There the aphorism 'Abba, give me a word of salvation' took on pragmatic meaning. Possibly without understanding its consequences, we blurted out the prayer of St Gregory Palamas: 'Lord, shed light on my darkness; shed light on my darkness.'[13] How inspiring were the exhortations of the elder that became engraved on the souls of the youngsters and adolescents!

* 'Have trust in God, "all our life beseeching Christ our God".'
* 'Prefer to love others than to be loved by others.'
* 'Every man has as an absolute calling to become holy. The aim of our Christian life is to acquire the Holy Spirit.'
* 'Joy is a precondition for the spiritual life.'
* 'Do not talk about God, experience him; do not write about God, comprehend him.'
* 'It is of value for young people, in spite of their intellectual limitations, to begin struggling for chastity, the monastic ideal, and for many, many other things.'

In that place we desired to live the tradition of St Athanasios of the Meteora, a model of the hesychastic life in the coenobium. The circumstances, however, were not entirely suitable. After a few years, we monks and novices of the Meteora, following an invitation, conveyed ourselves to the Holy Mountain in order to seek out a more dynamic tradition. This move to the Holy Mountain also signalled a new phase for us. It was not by accident that we chose Simonopetra: our journey was from one cluster of rocks to another comparable rock. It was the return of St Athanasios of the Meteora to his original starting-point, while for us it was a matter of vital urgency.[14] We arrived, in 1973, in an unfamiliar – I could say 'mythical' – and at the same time ascetic environment. What did we find there?

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[13] 'Life of Saint Gregory Palamas', in *The Synaxarion* 2 (14 November) (Ormylia, 2003), p. 134.

[14] 'Life of Saint Athanasios of Meteora', in *The Synaxarion* 4 (20 April) (Ormylia, 2003), p. 474.

The Mother of God

The Mother of God is fifth in my discussion of the elements of our spiritual tradition. In his enthronement address to the representatives of the Holy Community, Elder Aimilianos stated:

> This is the day of our official registration in the Bower of the Mother of God on the Holy Mountain. We sing a hymn of victory because we have enlisted in the choir of the Athonite fathers. That which we yearned for these many years, we now find at our feet [...] Now we are here in the place of the thousand-year-old tradition – or rather two-thousand-year-old – because it is impossible to cut the thread uniting the Holy Mountain to the whole of Orthodox monasticism [...][15]

On the Holy Mountain we have discovered the tradition of the Virgin Mother which is present in every place. We sought her because, when reading the holy fathers, we observed that whosoever of them was disposed to inner, mystical experiences or revelations and relationships with God, had a unique, heartfelt interior communication and an unbendable bond with the person of the All-Holy Mother of God.

We came to the Holy Mountain also to find our Most Holy Lady. And I remember how moved I felt when I paid a visit to the blessed spring of St Athanasios the Athonite. For this same reason I am particularly moved by the fact that I have received my abbot's staff from a Lavriote.[16] For me this is more important than if I had received it from the greatest patriarch in all history.

How moved I was on seeing that this holy well represents contact between our Most Holy Lady and a person; between the beyond and the here and now; between the heavens and the human race; between the accessible and the inaccessible, where we tread but do not comprehend, and yet behind which is hidden something intelligible, which can be perceived through our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God.

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[15] Address given at Elder Aimilianos's enthronement ceremony at Simonopetra, in *The Authentic Seal*, Spiritual Instructions and Discourses, vol. 1 (Ormylia, 1999), p. 94.

[16] A monk of the Great Lavra.

That day, as I visited the blessed spring of St Athanasios, I said that I really must become an Athonite.

The older fathers

The sixth feature that we discovered was the presence of the older fathers: our 'grandfathers'. We 'inherited' around ten elderly monks who welcomed us with kindness and offered us the best that they had, namely, the priceless Athonite oral tradition. This was a hidden treasure. In those simple and uneducated monks, our eyes were opened to four qualities that were to be important for all of us: a simple faith in God and in the saints; a pragmatic consciousness of one's own sinfulness; patience in all things and to all people; and faithfulness in worship.

Specifically, we recall Fr Kallistos, who for seventy years never left the Holy Mountain, even for a day. The only objects of his earthly reverence were the Holy Mountain and the monastery.

Fr Arsenios spent several years alone as a hesychast. In his cell he used metal hangers to stop him from falling asleep at night. His prayer was unceasing. An oil lamp was kept perpetually alight before his icon of St John the Russian who one night had assisted him in overcoming Satan. At his end he suffered from glaucoma; yet he refused to go to the doctor for an operation but preferred to remain blind, since this was the will of God. His forehead appeared to be full of sores, but this was because he struck it at night on the floor of his cell seeking mercy from God. A blessed man.

Fr Gelasios was responsible for handing over the monastery to us and decided, for reasons of prudence, to remove himself to Daphne. ('Not to interfere with the new brotherhood in their choice of actions', he said.) Foreseeing his own death, he asked permission to strike the *simantron* before vespers and then passed away as soon as he returned to his cell, within a quarter of an hour.

Finally, we recall Fr Simon who always wore a childlike smile and was blessed with a great deal of patience. He embraced all of us and was very tolerant towards us – indeed, each of the monks will need to seek his forgiveness in the next world for all that we did to him. Fr Simon followed the *typikon* of the Church faithfully for forty years. He never said, 'I know', but always, 'I have heard'. Neither did he speak ill of anyone, nor did he take an interest in worldly matters. His mind remained inside the walls of the monastery, in the church, with the saints, before the icons. In every conversation he was on the lookout for who would be the first to say a word of blessing. For visiting friends he always offered roasted hazelnuts wrapped in paper, which he himself had prepared with great courtesy and love. We also have in our possession many of his sayings. Day and night he prayed that faith would be preserved in the world. His departure from this life was reminiscent of the dormition of St Ephrem the Syrian as seen in Byzantine frescos. All of the fathers, within a few minutes of his death, paid their final respects to him.

These unpretentious men were the preservers of a great Byzantine tradition which they passed on with outstanding fidelity. We learned theology from teachers and books, but what they handed down to us was the 'how': truths on how to live in unbroken communion with the saints in a transfigured world where everything is regulated by the *typikon*.

Elder Aimilianos: the focus and fulfilment of the spiritual tradition of Simonopetra

The monastery's most recent history and image are identified with the person of the Elder Aimilianos. This is only natural, for in a monastery it is the elder who stands in the stead of God and whose type is Christ – something more readily apprehended when the person in question is experienced in the things of God and gifted in guiding souls. The elder himself describes this in the following way:

> Because of our weakness [...] we need a fellow man, visible and similar in appearance to ourselves, who will stand in the stead of God. The Creator agrees to this and gives his creature an elder for creator, a fellow servant, compounded as we are, to be the 'end of the vault of heaven' — the extreme, the final, the centre, the axis of life. He becomes the criterion, the depth and the height for the monk, so that he can reach 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. For that reason those who are under obedience to the elder frequently render an account of their lives, of their falls and recoveries and especially of the 'blessed passions', in which they exercise themselves and to which they grow accustomed. They also speak of the progress of their prayer, by which they gain the desired 'city'. Spiritual fatherhood is a harmonious co-operation between the monk and the elder, and is aimed at training in freedom and the cultivation of the personality. This discipleship does not degenerate into a cult of personality, but becomes God-bearing in humility and manliness.[17]

The elder is our inspirer, the person who in a mysterious fashion conducted us into the great mystery of monastic living. He did not commend to us a systematic teaching or a theological methodology, but knowing God in a revelatory manner, and suffering after things divine, he offers the possibility to all who want to follow him with fidelity to participate in their own way in this life in the Spirit. Now he is ailing, but he remains no less a true father.

How did he feel as a spiritual father? Since the elder of a monastery is the type and living icon of the incarnate Word of God, aside from the example of his personal ascetic and prayer life, he exercises as *diakonima* the articulation of the word. 'Without an active word', our elder used to say, 'it is impossible for a community of monks or of the faithful to progress.' For the active word is a type of teaching, spiritual, theological, and ethical in its scope, which has as its objective the training of the fathers for a personal engagement with the mysteries of God. It is also counsel, stimulation, persuasion, judgement, observation, praise, even abandonment. In all these things, the active word works to help and to adorn the soul that it may become a ready receptacle for the presence of God.

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[17] 'The Role of the Spiritual Father in an Orthodox Monastery': interview to the Südwestkunk (Baden Baden) for the film, *Athos. One Thousand Years as One Day* (1983) in A. Golitzin, op. cit., p. 166.

The elder never intended to use his word to impose upon his disciples stereotypes of the monastic life, or to force them to imitate his own manner of approaching God. But in a spirit of exceptional freedom and breadth of mind he offers them a spiritual education. An authority on the monastic tradition and a man respectful of the *typikon* of the Church, he did not stop at categories of external piety and routine asceticism. What he aimed at was to manifest each one of his novices as a unique personality before God. Wide-ranging and unprejudiced, generous with his time and accommodating to our youthful aspirations, he created so unique and personal a relationship with us that each of his children believed the elder's life and speech were only for him.

In order to offer such an upbringing, Elder Aimilianos received from God the gift to discern, from the first moment of encounter, what the central element of the personality of each one of us was. '[There are] two or three things', he would say to us, 'that are capable of uniting us with God or, were we to close our eyes to them, make us fail in our goal.' And many times, perhaps after many years, he would remind us of a word he had said to us at one of our first encounters, which was the crucial element in our whole spiritual life.

His respect for the integrity of his spiritual children was so great that he would never wish to take decisions for them. He said that the elder ought to stand behind his protégé, to support him and to raise him up when he might fall, but to leave to him the initiative desired for his progress towards God. On many occasions we asked him to tell us what we must do; but he, smiling, would answer us, 'Do whatever you want, my child.'

By bringing us up in this fashion, full of joy and freedom – but not without a degree of peril – Elder Aimilianos was able, with pure monastic precision, to inculcate in us the living stream of the mind of the fathers, and to instruct us in the heart of the Church. In so doing he attracted, too, the interest of contemporary youth who would come to him from the turbulent secular society.

The wider spiritual family

The paternal relationship that Elder Aimilianos fostered with his spiritual children was not confined to monks. He also sustained it with any who had not embraced the monastic vocation, but with his blessing had taken up married life. For this reason, when we talk about the spiritual tradition of Simonopetra, we cannot separate the monks from the laity. We are all children of the one Father, and thus as one very large spiritual family scattered to the four ends of the world, each one tries, in the place given to him by divine providence, to be well pleasing to God and to apply to his life the teachings of our elder.

Monks, nuns, men, women, children – all have the same dream, the same orientation. Each believes that in this life our sojourn is nothing but a longing for the Lord, and that in this life we can have a foretaste of the glory of his Kingdom. This portrayal may, of course, be found also in other monasteries on the Holy Mountain, and elsewhere, wherever spiritual families are gathered around a spiritual father. Indeed we could say that this familial character, this warmth, is a common feature in all Orthodox monasteries. The monks have withdrawn from all worldly things and live only for God; but the monastery embraces everyone – blood relatives, friends, those near, and those far away – in order to make them feel at home with God as valued members of the brotherhood.

The catholic dimension of the monastery

In view of the fact that the monastery represents the children of God assembled together as one body,[18] it only stands to reason that a monastic brotherhood will not be party to linguistic, ethnic, educational, or social restrictions, or to discrimination. Yet, due to historical circumstances, this is not the case everywhere on the Holy Mountain; nor is it so in other places. As with various other aspects of the monastic tradition, this has undergone renewal only in the last years. Since racial and ethnic contentions are to be transcended, monks from different backgrounds can now live together in harmony in a good many monasteries on the Holy Mountain. This is the case in our own house, where monks of eight different nationalities live. In order to preserve unity, everyone speaks Greek and follows the tradition of the monastery, contributing to the brotherhood the experiences and the genius of their own cultures.

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[18] 'The scattered children of God are brought together as one body and find comfort under the same wings, travelling together in concord to the house of God, adapting themselves to that harmony which is from the Holy Spirit', St Gregory the Theologian, *First Oration on Peace.*

None of this was pre-planned. Of their own accord, men of different nationalities came to the monastery, and the elder, motivated by a profound ecclesiastical consciousness, and remembering the example of St Theodosios in Palestine and St Athanasios the Athonite (who, in his lifetime [tenth century], made the Holy Mountain a microcosm of the Byzantine *oikoumene*), did not reject them.

When, on one occasion, a group of French monks appeared at Simonopetra asking to be received into Orthodoxy on the Holy Mountain, the elder took a risk – not only in accepting them into the brotherhood, but, after several years, in sending them back to France in order to create, for the first time in history, Athonite *metochia*, or dependent houses, in Western Europe. We do not regret this bold move. For the past twenty-five years these *metochia* have, under difficult circumstances, given to France and to the West a humble but authentic witness of genuine Orthodox monasticism. Thus the founding of the French *metochia*, in addition to other activities or, rather, ecclesiastical undertakings of several fathers of Simonopetra – for example in Albania – refashioned the particular traits of the monastery, without, however, altering its ascetic and hesychastic orientation.

Female monasticism

To this image of Simonopetra's catholicity we must add the significance that the elder gave to the creation of contemporary female monastic dependencies under the aegis of the monastery. For example, the convent of the Annunciation in Ormylia, where today more than 100 nuns live together; and the two female *metochia* in France, that of the Transfiguration and that of the Holy Protection. The establishment of none of these was pre-planned, but came about as a natural consequence of the life of the brotherhood. With the transfer of the community to the Holy Mountain, it became essential to find a monastery for the sisters who had begun to form a company near the Meteora.

When the Vatopedi monastery kindly handed over its abandoned rural *metochion* in Ormylia, our first sisters were able to install themselves in a very rough way, and apply with joy and enthusiasm the Athonite manner of living, adapting it to their particular circumstances. For this new community, Elder Aimilianos wrote a rule inspired by the fathers. In a manner both traditional and contemporary, he laid out his spiritual principles. This *typikon*, which has already been published in English in the first volume of the *Instructions and Discourses* of Father Aimilianos, constitutes for us at Simonopetra a reference text and a cornerstone.

Concluding remarks

With these ten features we can, therefore, summarize the essence of Simonopetra. But what meaning do all of these things have for you who live so far away from us, both in terms of geography and lifestyle? We realize that your interest in the Holy Mountain is not restricted to its cultural legacy, which is of course the common heritage of Europe. You seek something else, as do the thousands of pilgrims that flood on to the Holy Mountain each year. It is the thirst of contemporary man for something mystical, spiritual, something that might remind him of Paradise.

Our experience of almost thirty years, from the time when we came to the Holy Mountain with that same thirst, has revealed to us a holy truth. In spite of the historical and social changes that it has undergone, the Holy Mountain is today, as it always has been, truly the 'Garden of the Mother of God'. For you it is an open window, a window through which you too can witness what an angel, a type of Christ, once showed to the Apostle John the Theologian: the heavenly Jerusalem, the eschatological dwelling of God with men.

We, the humble sons of St Simon the Myrrh-streamer, bear witness to this truth. Nothing has been lost of the wonderful heritage of the fathers of the Church. Christianity has not aged; it has only grown. It sustains all of its power to transform, on this very earth, human life into an angelic society. And the mystical light that radiates from Athos is, for all, a hope of glory.

Further Reading

Archimandrite Aimilianos, *The Authentic Seal*, Spiritual Instructions and Discourses, vol. 1 (Ormylia, 1999).

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ALEXANDER GOLITZIN

Topos Theou: The Monastic Elder as Theologian and as Theology.
An Appreciation of Archimandrite Aimilianos

Introduction: Aimilianos of Simonopetra, together with Some Terms and Limitations

Let me begin with the very few biographical details about my subject that I am able to supply. Archimandrite Aimilianos, abbot of Simonopetra monastery on Mount Athos from 1973 to 2000, was born Alexander Vapheiades in Athens in 1934 to refugees from Asia Minor who had settled in the Greek capital. He took his degree in theology from the University of Athens in the late 1950s and, in 1960, was invited by the Bishop of Trikkala, Dionysios, to take a post in the latter's diocese, where he served as a priest-monk, teacher of religion in the secondary schools, and preacher. Not much later, sometime in the early 1960s, the bishop, who was also the young hieromonk's spiritual father, asked him to renew monasticism in the deserted monastery of the Transfiguration, Great Meteora. He obeyed, and for some years lived alone, effectively as a hermit, atop the great rock on which that monastery is built. Eventually disciples came, many of them the high-school children to whom he had taught catechetics in the early years of his priesthood. The community grew, together with a women's monastery populated in good part by the sisters and cousins of the young monks. The growing pressure of tourism, together with the death of Bishop Dionysios in 1970 and his replacement by a prelate who was less certain what to do with monks, led to the community's decision to leave Great Meteora and accept an invitation from the ageing community at the monastery of Simonopetra on Athos to settle there, which they did in July 1973. Not long afterwards, the women's community purchased a property in Halkidiki near the village of Ormylia, where they remain today, technically a dependency (*metochion*) of Simonopetra, but in fact considerably larger (over 140 sisters) and at least as influential. In 1978 three more dependencies were begun in France, two of them for women and one for men. In the early 1990s Fr Aimilianos began to show signs of the illness that would quickly rob him of the ability to speak. By 1995 or 1996 he required constant care and took up residence with the sisters of Ormylia where he remains today. On 6 December 2000 Archimandrite Elisaios was elected in his place as abbot of Simonopetra. Perhaps in part to make up for the lack of his living voice, the sisters began to transcribe and publish their collection of his tape-recorded talks and sermons. The first volume came out in 1995 and three more have appeared since, roughly one every two years, with translations into other languages appearing somewhat later.[1]

When Bishop Kallistos (Ware) first approached me to participate in this conference, he asked me to discourse on the characteristics of Athonite spirituality, the same topic that we find Bishop Nikolaos (Hadzinikolaou) covering earlier in this volume far more competently than I could have managed.[2] Knowing something of my limitations, I refused the assignment, with the happy results just noted, and proposed instead a talk on Fr Aimilianos, the single Athonite personality with whom I can claim some acquaintance. 'Very well', the bishop replied; 'but please remember that this is to be a *serious* talk, not a mere reminiscence, and that we are looking for a certain scholarly quality since we hope to publish these lectures.' I agreed to the conditions, though with fingers slightly crossed behind my back, for reasons I shall explain in a moment.

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[1] The volumes in Greek are so far the following: *Sphragis Gnisia* (Ormylia, 1995); *Zoi en Pneumati* (Ormylia, 1998); *Agalliasometha to Kyrio* (Ormylia, 1999); and *Theia Latreia: Prosdokia kai Orasis Theou* (Ormylia, 2001). The first two volumes now exist in French and Romanian translations, and, the first volume only, in English: *The Authentic Seal* (Ormylia, 1999). Translation into Russian is also underway.

[2] Bishop Nikolaos (Hadzinikolaou), 'Distinctive Elements in Athonite Spirituality', above, pp. 17–47. I find to my pleasure that many of the notes Bishop Nikolaos touches on in his contribution are echoed in my remarks below, notably the evocation of Moses on Sinai, of the recovery of Eden, the stress on freedom, on apophatic theology and experience, and even the opening portrait of the ebb and flow of light in the monastic services, matching some of my descriptions in the latter part of this essay. I shall have occasion to note echoes of other essays included in this volume in what follows.

Several terms appear in my title, to each of which I should like to attach a brief explanation or definition before going on to discuss one of them in greater detail. Working backwards, then, there is first of all the 'appreciation' of my acquaintance with Fr Aimilianos, and the reasons for the crossed fingers while making my pledge to the bishop. This was more than a mere acquaintance. It amounted in effect to an education. In the space roughly of an academic year, from November 1977 to July 1978, this particular saint shaped my understanding of theology, of the Church, and of Christianity itself in ways that continue to reveal themselves to me even today. Whenever I leaf through his published talks, I am unfailingly startled at finding things that I thought I had just rediscovered – or at least re-emphasized – in the tradition, but which in fact Fr Aimilianos speaks of continually in lectures and sermons tape-recorded from over thirty years ago. The effect is not unlike walking past a shop window and catching a glimpse in its reflection of the face of one's father or mother. I find, in other words, that I carry the man's stamp – not, certainly, his holiness, but something of his theological vision. He impressed himself on me, largely without my being aware of his doing so, and it is to how he did this without violating my integrity, but rather enhancing it, that I should like to devote the last part of this essay.

But first allow me, as promised, to turn to the other terms I included in my title, since they define what Fr Aimilianos is for his children in God. 'Theologian' and 'monastic elder' are to be understood together. In one important current (and I think the central one) of Orthodox tradition, they amount to a functional identity. Here, of course, I am employing the patristic and strong sense of the word 'theologian', which understands the latter less as a seminary or university professor, like me, than as one who speaks from the experience (*peira*), and hence with something of the authority, of God. Thus the elder, ever since his apparition in the earliest literature of the monastic movement that we possess, represents for his (or her) disciples the voice and face of his – and their – master and God, Christ. For them, he becomes the *topos theou*, the 'place of God', God made visible and present. He is therefore also 'theology', by which I mean again not primarily the modern (and ancient, pagan) understanding of the word, defined by Liddell and Scott's classical Greek dictionary – and by the good Jesuit fathers of the university which employs me – as 'rational discourse about divinity', but the much fuller, expanded set of meanings we find in that most admirable Oxford production, G.W.H. Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, where I discern five basic senses, in the following order of ascending importance: (1) rational discourse about divinity; (2) holy Scripture; (3) divine worship, celebrated by (a) the angels and saints in heaven, and (b) the Church on earth; (4) the vision or experience of God; and (5) God himself, the Holy Trinity.[3] To meet a genuine elder is to meet 'theology' in the full and ancient sense. Such was – and is – Fr Aimilianos for me, as for the rest of his children. Through him, as it were through a lens, I read the Scriptures and the Fathers, and celebrate the Liturgy, and write my middling-rational discourses, and teach my students, and strive – intermittently – to live out the Christian faith. He became such for me by teaching me how to read Dionysius the Areopagite, though again not so much by formal instruction – indeed, I recall nothing of whatever he may have said to me about that Church Father – as by the example of his person, by the delicacy of his pedagogy, and by the way he structured the life and rhythms of his monastery, its daily rounds, and, most especially, the mutual reflection of its common worship and its monks' nightly labours in the solitude of their cells.

I shall try to provide a suggestion of this mystagogy, my theological reminiscence, towards the end of my essay, but for now I should like primarily to dwell on the words and phrases I touched on so lightly just now, focusing on the notion of 'the place'. Together with a related constellation of terms, it extends back into the revelation of the Old Testament and, from biblical and post-biblical Israel, forward into the New Testament portrayal of Christ, of the Church, and of the Christian, and thence to the Fathers, to the holy monks, to the Liturgy which we celebrate today, and, for my purposes here, ultimately to Fr Aimilianos. I want, in other words, to draw his picture not primarily through biography or reminiscence, or even by quoting him – though in what follows I shall from time to time include apposite citations from his published works – but by exploring what I believe him to be, what he embodies. Allow me then to offer a little sketch of this continuum, centring it on the opening phrase of my title.

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[3] See G.W.H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961, rep. 1972), pp. 627–8.

Topos Theou

In the Old Testament

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place [*bimmaqom hazzeh*].' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place [*hammaqom hazzeh*]! This is none other than the house of God [*bet elohim*], and this the gate of heaven [*sha'ar hashmayyim*]!' (Genesis 28:16–17)

These verses come at the end of the story of Jacob's dream-vision of the ladder that connects heaven and earth, at the top of which stands God, and on which God's angels 'ascend and descend'. The importance of this passage in later Christian and especially monastic literature is considerable. One thinks immediately of St John of Sinai's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, but the latter was drawing on currents evident in some of the earliest monastic writings we possess, and from further back still, as in the use the fourth Gospel makes of it as an implied description of Christ. In our own times Fr Aimilianos will employ two of the phrases from the verses I quoted, 'house of God' and 'gate of heaven', for a definition of the monastic life in one of the few essays that he seems ever formally to have composed.[4]

It is, however, on the phrase 'this place', whose Hebrew I troubled to reproduce, that I wish to dwell a bit in what follows, in particular on the word 'place', *maqom*. In the Hebrew Scriptures this word takes on, in certain contexts, the force of a technical term, whose reverberations embrace the different elements we have just seen included in Jacob's dream at Bethel: God, his presence and his house, the link with heaven in the 'gate' or 'door', thus the note of the *axis mundi* joining heaven and earth, and the angels, together with – at least by implication – their liturgy.[5] A few examples from other Old Testament books will bring each of these points into greater relief.

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[4] See 'Monastic Life: The House of God and the Gate of Heaven', *The Authentic Seal*, pp. 105–30.

In Exodus 3:5, the episode of the burning bush, the Angel of the Lord instructs Moses to remove his sandals, 'for the place [*hammaqom*] on which you are standing is holy ground'. Obviously, it is holy because it is the site of God's appearance, of theophany. In Exodus 24:10–11 Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders 'see the God of Israel' on Mount Sinai, and eat with him. Following his vision and meal shared with the elders, Moses ascends the mountain by himself at the end of chapter 24 in order to receive what is arguably the climax of the Sinai revelation. 'Have them make me a sanctuary', God tells the lawgiver, 'that I may dwell [*šakanti*] among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle so you shall make it' (Exod. 25:8–9). The fact that God shows Moses the 'pattern' (Hebrew *tabnit*, Greek *paradeigma*) led to – if it did not in fact assume – the belief that the tabernacle was the copy of a heavenly original, God's palace or temple on high. The revelation of the tabernacle represents the climax of the Sinai revelation because it enables God, as we just saw him point out, to dwell with his people and appear to them in the same way that he manifested himself on the mountain. The travelling shrine is a sort of portable Sinai, as the conclusion of Exodus makes clear, with the same cloud and fiery glory that had marked the great theophany of chapters 19–24 now 'over-shadowing' (in the Greek) and taking up residence within the temporary sanctuary (Exod. 40:34).

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[5] On the Hebrew *maqom* and its Greek equivalent, *topos*, in the Masoretic text, the Septuagint, and the New Testament, see the relevant essays by J. Gamberoni and H. Köster in, respectively, *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. J. Botterwick *et al.*, tr. D. E. Green (Grand Rapids, 1995), 8: 532–44, and *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, tr. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, 1968), 8: 187–208.

The expedient of a travelling shrine will shortly be replaced by a more permanent residence which, as Moses puts it in Deuteronomy 12:16, Israel is to erect in 'the place [*hammaqom*] that the Lord God will choose as a dwelling for his Name'. So David in Psalm 132:4–5 vows to go without sleep until he finds 'a place [*maqom*] for the Lord', and the place in question is of course the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. According to 1 Chronicles 28:11 and 19, Solomon builds the Temple in agreement with the 'plan' (or 'pattern', again *tabnit*) that his father David had written 'at the Lord's direction'. Just as we may assume that this 'pattern' is the same heavenly original as was shown to Moses, so does the consecration of the Temple in 1 Kings 8:10–11 mirror at once the consecration of the tabernacle at the end of Exodus, and the appearance of the glory at the great theophany on Sinai. Psalm 68 makes this transference from Sinai to Zion specific: 'With mighty chariots, twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands, the Lord came from Sinai into his holy [place], the processions of God, my God, into the sanctuary' (vv.17 and 24).[6] Thus it is Zion, the place of his habitation in the Temple, where God is often depicted in the prophecies as inaugurating his reign at the *eschaton*, such as in Malachi 3:1ff., or in the long oracle of Isaiah 31–5, where the prophet promises his readers, 'Your eyes will see the King in his beauty' (33:17) – a text that would enjoy a distinguished history in subsequent Jewish and Christian mystical literature.[7]

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[6] For the important role this psalm played in rabbinical exegesis and the synagogue liturgy, particularly as linking the Torah reading of the gift of the covenant at the Sinai theophany, celebrated at the feast of *šabu'ot*, and the *haftorah* from the chariot vision of Ezekiel 1, see D. Halperin, *Faces in the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 16–18, 60–1, and esp. 141–8.

[7] On the importance of this verse in both Christian and Jewish literature, see my article, '"Earthly Angels and Heavenly Men": The OT Pseudepigrapha, Nicetas Stethatos, and the Tradition of "Interiorized Apocalyptic" in Eastern Christian Ascetical and Mystical Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55 (2001), 125–53; here 131–5 and notes 26–43.

In the New Testament

'Amen, amen I tell you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (John 1:51).

While they clearly allude to Genesis 28:12–17, these words of Christ to Nathaniel do not include use of the Greek equivalent of *maqom*, *topos*. The latter in fact does not appear in the New Testament in any of the specific ways that I have dwelt on in the Old Testament, save a couple of references to 'the holy place', which are in fact quotations of Daniel 11:21, together with its use in Acts 6:13–14, where 'holy place'– i.e. the Temple – appears in the mouths of St Stephen's accusers, nor does the protomartyr have much good to say about Solomon's edifice, citing against it Isaiah 66:1ff. Likewise, the Samaritan woman mentions the *topos* where Jews 'are supposed to worship' (John 4:20), in opposition to her own Mount Gerizim, only to be corrected by Jesus regarding the true worship that will be offered to the Father 'in Spirit and in truth' (4:21–3). Yet, while the word itself does not play a significant role in the New Testament, the constellation of associations around tabernacle and temple with which 'the place' is entwined do play a role, and an altogether central one. It is essential to recall those associations with 'the place' in order to interpret the verse with which I began this section. Christ's reply to Nathaniel depends on them. His saying, in effect, that he is the 'place of God', the *axis mundi*, joining the world above to the one below, the true tabernacle of the Presence, the Beth-El and 'door of heaven', points that echo throughout the fourth Gospel in particular, beginning with John 1:14 and the Word 'tabernacling among us', whose glory, the Evangelist says, 'we have seen', and continuing in the 'I am' sayings which are among this Gospel's most distinctive features.[8] That believers, too, are called through Christ to become the 'place' of divine revelation emerges at least a couple of times in the fourth Gospel. In chapter 7 of John, in the context of the great feast of Tabernacles that concluded with a solemn blessing of waters, Jesus declares:

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[8] Cf also the Lord's explicit equating of his body with the Temple in John 2:19–21, and, related to the 'gate of heaven', the saying in John 10:7 and 9: 'I am the gate.'

> 'If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture said, rivers of living water shall flow out of his belly.' And he said this [the Evangelist adds] about the Spirit which those who believed in him were going to receive. (John 7:38–9)

The scripture to which the Lord alludes is first of all Ezekiel 47's river flowing from the eschatologically renewed Temple, together with later references to this tradition in Joel and Zachariah, and perhaps we should recall here as well the rivers which flow from the Garden of Eden to water the earth in Genesis 2. The accounts of the creation and Paradise in Genesis 1–2 appear in recent scholarly literature to have been closely linked with traditions around the Temple, and in the verses from John that I quote here, as well as in John the Seer's 'river of life' flowing 'from beneath the throne of God and of the Lamb'. These traditions are clearly alive in the era of the New Testament – as, in fact, they will continue to be in subsequent Christian literature.[9] What Christ is saying here is that everyone who believes in him is potentially a temple, and not only a temple, but the temple of the end times and new creation, the locus of the Presence, of Paradise, and the Tree of Life, and a source or font of the living and salvific Spirit to others.

Here we arrive at the adumbration of the Christian saint. This note is also repeated in both John 14:21–3, the abode (*moni*) of God and assurance of revelation – 'and I shall manifest myself to him'– which Christ promises his disciples, and 17:5 and 22–4, where he speaks of having already given them 'the Glory which I had with you [the Father] before the world was'. It is no accident that these verses, especially the second pair, appear with great frequency in the monastic literature of the fourth century and thereafter. The striking figure of the holy man in late antiquity that Peter Brown brought to the scholarly world's attention with such *élan* thirty years ago in fact long antedates the remarkable figure of St Symeon Stylites whom Brown chose as his model.[10] The outlines of the holy man are discernible in the New Testament itself, while his ancestry extends further back into the revelation accorded Israel: to Moses, the prophets, and the seers of the many apocalypses which immediately precede, and are contemporary with, the coming of Christ and the genesis of the New Testament books. Again, this note is also prominent in monastic literature from its earliest appearance to the present day. The nuns of Ormylia speak rightly of Fr Aimilianos's sources

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[9] On the linkage between the creation account in Gen. 1–2 and the traditions of tabernacle and temple, see the following, in roughly chronological order: R. Patai, *Man and the Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth* (rev. edn. New York, 1967), esp. pp. 54–131; R.J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), esp. pp. 98–181; M. Weinfeld, 'Sabbath, Temple, and the Enthronement of the Lord – the Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3', in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor (Neukirchner, 1981), pp. 501–12; J.D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco, 1985), esp. pp. 111–84; M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London, 1991), esp. pp. 57–132; and eadem, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1995), esp. pp. 10–39 and 61–72.

> in the biblical revelations [lit., 'theophanies'] of God, and the apocalyptic experiences [*apokalyptikes empiries*] of the patriarchs, the righteous, and the prophets who truly saw the living God, whose visions are interpreted in the light of the uncreated energies [...] [and] of the saintly monks and ascetics of the Holy Mountain, glorified in transfiguration, and of all those in East and West who have lived as ascetics, known or unknown [to us] but all known to God.[11]

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[10] P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), 80–101. See also on Symeon Stylites S.A. Harvey, 'Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 42 (1988), 11–33; and for studies on fourth-century holy men, the following: M.S. Burrows, 'The Visibility of God in the Holy Man: A Reconsideration of the Role of the Apa in the Pachomian *Vitae*', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 41 (1987), 11–33; G. Bunge, *Geistliche Vaterschaft: Christliche Gnosis bei Evagrios Pontikos* (Regensburg, 1988), esp. pp. 33–6, 40–50, and 69–82; and H. Dörries, *Die Theologie des Makarios/Symeon* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 336–66. On the phenomenon more broadly, see P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church* (Oxford, 1978), esp. pp. 18–67; and specifically for its relation to the theology of the divine glory, the *kevod YHWH*, and theophany, see A.A. Orlov and A. Golitzin, '"Many Lamps are Lightened from the One": Paradigms of the Transformational Vision in the Macarian Homilies', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 55 (2001), 281–98, esp. 293ff.

[11] 'Introduction', *The Authentic Seal*, p. 12; Greek in *Sphragis Gnisia*, p. 22.

The web of associations connected with my chosen phrase, 'place of God', is much more widespread in the New Testament than in just the Johannine books and letters. It is prominent in St Paul, as in his references to believers both collectively and severally as the 'temple of God' or 'of the Spirit' in 1 and 2 Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20; 2 Cor. 6:17–20), or to them as sites of the 'glory of God in the face of Christ' in 2 Cor. 4:6 (and cf. 3:18). In the synoptics, Christ is the place of the glory, or rather the glory itself in the three accounts of the transfiguration, or in Matthew's and especially Luke's narratives of the nativity, thus the 'power of the Most High' over-shadowing the Virgin in Luke 1:35 as the cloud and glory 'over-shadowed' the tabernacle in the Septuagint version of Exodus 40:34, or righteous Symeon's holding in his arms the 'light to the Gentiles' and 'Glory of Israel', or Matthew's 'Immanuel', 'God with us'. There is regrettably no time to dwell on these other texts, though I cannot resist pointing out that the Virgin in St Luke's Gospel is herself effectively equated with the tabernacle and temple, the *topos theou*, a point brought out in detail a century or so later in the wonderful, early Christian meditation on these nativity stories, the *Protevangelium of James*, whose expansion on the theme of our Lady as temple is echoed in the Church's festal cycle, as well as in the ascetical and mystical writers, for whom the Theotokos is the very paradigm of the Christian's vocation.[12] It is no accident that we find the great reverence accorded her by the monks of Athos, for whom she is exemplar, protectress, abbess, and in whose garden they see themselves as living and serving.

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[12] See, for example, the *Akathistos Hymn*, canticle five, the second *stikheron* after the *eirmos*. The phrase which Kallistos Ware and Mother Mary render as 'sanctuary of the Glory', in *The Lenten Triodion* (London/Boston, 1977), p. 432, is in the Greek, *topos hagiasmatos tis doxis*, literally: '*place* of sanctification of [the] glory', which the translators rightly read and render as equivalent to 'temple': 'sanctuary'. On the Theotokos as paradigm of the Christian life, see St Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses* 1.9–10, in *Syméon le nouveau théologien: traités théologiques et éthiques*, ed. J. Darrouzès, *Sources Chrétiennes* 122 (Paris, 1966), pp. 246–66; English in *St Symeon the New Theologian on the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses* 1: *The Church and the Last Things*, tr. A. Golitzin (Crestwood, 1995), pp. 52–60; and for earlier examples of the same idea from the Syrian sources, S. Brock, 'Mary and the Eucharist: An Oriental Perspective', *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review*, 1:2 (1979), 50–9.

There is a third reflection or embodiment of the *topos theou* in the New Testament, and in fact it is this third expression of 'the place' which mediates the one and primary expression, Christ, to each of us, the believers. I mean the Church generally, and specifically the *synaxis*, the faithful assembled for worship 'in one place' – *epi to auto*, as the Book of Acts and Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) are so fond of repeating.[13] Here I can do no better than begin by citing Fr Aimilianos from a sermon given seventeen years ago:

> The most splendid likeness of the beauty itself of God's court on high is the daily worship that we have in our churches [lit., 'temples', naoi]. We are talking [here] about the [heavenly] court of Christ, but the exact impression of our worship is also that court. There is a single moving and living image of the Glory of Christ which becomes present in our worship. It becomes our life, bread, light, river of life, voices as of cataracts [cf. Ps. 41:8], just as above, in heaven. He who sits enthroned there is also here, upon the cherubim, with fire and radiance of light.[14]

We can surely make out the echoes here of the 'pattern' revealed to Moses on Sinai, as well as several of the other texts that I have touched on. It is the 'pattern' as repeated in tabernacle and temple that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has in mind (and a phrase that Fr Aimilianos just echoed) when he speaks of the 'shadow' (*skia*) giving way to the 'image' (*eikon*) (Heb. 10:1). A little further along, the same writer compares the theophany at Sinai with what Christians have presented to them now:

> You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom, and the sound of a trumpet. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven. (Heb. 12:18–23).

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[13] e.g. Acts 2:1 (NRSV: 'in one place'), 44, 47; 1 Cor 14:23; and see J. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church and Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, tr. E. Theokritoff (Brookline, 2001), pp. 19, 48–9, 52, 158, 198; and cf. Fr Aimilianos's use of this phrase below, n.92.

[14] 'O Thronos tou Theou', in *Zoe en Pneumati*, p. 380 (my translation).

This is the same note sounded by John in the Revelation, whose vision begins on 'the Lord's day' (Rev. 1:9), which is to say, on the day of the Eucharist, and whose book is read by many scholars today as rooted in, and as reflecting, the Liturgy.[15] The Liturgy is then the image – indeed, the 'pattern' – and real anticipation of the *eschaton*. Far from being the Platonizing corruption of some earlier, 'horizontal' notion of Christian worship, this idea is grounded in the deepest levels of the Hebrew Bible, in that moment which is in a sense constitutive of Israel itself: the revelation on Sinai of God, of the covenant, and of the tabernacle, the true and divinely ordained worship. The 'place' is where Moses and the elders see God, where God dwells among men because he 'has desired it', where the angels – as in Ezekiel's cherubim and Isaiah's seraphim – sing eternally, and where thus heaven and earth meet, where the beginning and end are joined. For Christians, the 'place' is Christ; it is the Church, his body; and, through our incorporation into that body, through being clothed with Christ, as St Paul says, it is also each one of us. These three 'places', which are ultimately one and the same 'place'– Christ in heaven, Christ on the altar, and Christ in the heart – will appear continuously throughout the literature of the early Church. From the fourth century on, we find them especially accentuated in the monastic writers, where this emphasis remains to the present day. Allow me to begin a little earlier, however, with a few examples from the pre-Nicene Church.

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[15] See again, Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, pp. 52–3, 66–7 and 83, nn. 154–6; and for a full-length study, P. Prigent, *Apocalypse et liturgie* (Neuchâtel/Paris, 1964).

The Early Martyrs and Wandering Ascetics as 'the Place'

It is not so much the sufferings of the martyrs that I am concerned with here, though that is an important topic and one to which Fr Aimilianos directs his attention in a number of his published talks,[16] but rather with the fact that, through their sufferings, they were and are understood as 'the place'. We find this idea *in nuce* as early as the Book of Acts in St Luke's portrait of the first martyr. Before his inquisitors, and clearly on the way to his death, Stephen's face becomes 'as the face of an angel' (Acts 6:15), that is, filled with the divine light. A chapter later, he provokes his murder by looking up and declaring that the heavens have opened up to him, that he sees the glory, and Christ at the Father's right hand (7:55–6). These two scenes, the light-filled face and the opening of heaven to the divine throne, sandwich the protomartyr's words against the old instantiation of 'the place', the temple of bricks and mortar which now, through Jesus Messiah, has been surpassed. It is exactly this confrontation between the old and the new senses of 'the place' that I think St Luke's account is at pains to underline.

In St Ignatius of Antioch's *Letters*, these several notes become more distinct, including mention of the three different senses of 'place'. When he writes of his forthcoming martyrdom, he asks his readers in Rome to allow him to become

> a libation [...] poured out [...] while there is still an altar ready', that he is 'God's wheat [...] ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ [...] a sacrifice to God.[17]

He pleads that he may become, in sum, a kind of Eucharist, a manifestation indeed of Christ. Two generations later, in the *Letter of Smyrneans'* account of the martyr's death by Ignatius's sometime correspondent, Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna, the association with the eucharistic sacrifice is still more prominent, but what catches my attention particularly occurs a few lines just before Polycarp's prayer and immolation:

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[16] Thus, e.g., 'Martyrdom: A Fundamental Element of Orthodox Monasticism', and 'The Ease of Violence and the Violence of Ease', in *The Authentic Seal*, pp. 249–69 and 335–52, resp.

[17] Romans 2 and 4 (*SChr* 108 and 110–12).

> [...] when the pile [of wood] was made ready, divesting himself of all his upper garments and loosing his girdle, he endeavoured also to take off his shoes, though not in the habit of doing this before, because all the faithful at all times vied eagerly who should soonest touch his flesh.[18]

I should like first to underline the saint's removal of his shoes, which I think we can read as an allusion to Moses' removal of his sandals before the burning bush, because 'the place' on which he stood was 'holy ground'. This detail is not, so to speak, a matter of simple house-keeping, that is, of the martyr's physical preparation for death, but instead a clue to the theology of his death, as is made clear by the fact, second, that it is coupled immediately with the assertion that this was not his usual custom, since his flesh was already regarded as holy by his flock. The sense of the statement seems to be that the saint is now acceding to their veneration because he too believes that, by virtue of the sacrifice he is about to become, his flesh, his physical body, is on its way towards becoming theophanic. He is becoming 'the place'. Third, my interpretation is supported by the opening lines of Tertullian's little treatise, *De Corona*, whose young soldier-martyr removes his sandals once his death is assured because, as Tertullian is kind enough to point out, the place where the young man was standing had become 'holy ground'.[19] The allusion to Moses at the burning bush is clear, unambiguous. The young martyr, as with Polycarp, knows that he is becoming 'the place'.

A similar or, rather, effectively identical understanding informs the picture of the wandering ascetics who fill the several *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* which remained popular Christian reading, and perhaps especially so with monks, from the late second century well into the Middle Ages, and this in spite of recurring episcopal disapproval – as, for example, in the case of the unfortunate Priscillian in late fourth-century Spain.[20] Their bodies, says the third-century *Acts of Thomas*, are 'holy temples', and they are themselves consequently empowered with 'the authority to forgive sins'.[21] To use my preferred term in this essay, they are 'places' of the divine presence, reconciling the world to God, and thus 'doubles' – a frequent theme in this literature – for Christ himself. On occasion, they are also clearly theophanic. Perched above a pool of man-eating seals into which her persecutors wish to throw her, the ascetic Thekla spares them the trouble:

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[18] 'Martyrdom of Polycarp' 13.2 (*SChr* 226).

[19] *De Corona* 1, *PL* 2.95A.

> When she threw herself into the water in the name of Jesus Christ, the seals saw a ray as of a lightning-flash of fire and floated up, dead. And there was around her a cloud of fire, such that the beasts neither touched her, nor was her nakedness seen.[22]

The fire, cloud, and lightning-flash deliberately recall the biblical theophanies. Thekla is clothed with the divine presence. Two hundred or so years later, we find the following description of Mariamne, the disciple of the Apostle Philip, who is also the subject of an attempted murder in the *Acta Philipi*, and with similar or even more spectacular results:

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[20] On the attraction of themes from the *Apocryphal Acts* for Priscillian, see H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 24, 77–8, 87, 91–3, 99, 101, and 166–7 – with the last featuring an interesting attempt to link this Spanish teacher, together with the nun Egeria, to Syrian Messalianism. My own inclination would be rather to understand both Priscillian and the Syrian monks as particular expressions – the Messalians in a clearly exaggerated and frankly heretical fashion – of themes held in common throughout much of the literature of early Christian asceticism, especially concentrated in Syria. For the most thorough and sober treatment of Messalianism to date, though with scant reference to biblical and post-biblical Jewish traditions, see K. Fitschen, *Messalianismus-Antimessalianismus: ein Beispiel östkirchlicher Ketzergeschichte* (Göttingen, 1998).

[21] *Acta Thomae* 94; Greek text in M. Bonnet (ed.), *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (rep. Hildesheim, 1959) 2.1, p.207, 2. 16–18.

[22] *Acta Pauli et Theclae* 34; in Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* 1, pp. 260:10–261:4.

> But when they stripped Mariamne so they could look at her nakedness, straightaway the likeness of her body was changed [...] [It] became as it were a glass ark, filled with light and fire, and straightaway there came round her a cloud of fire before them all, and they were completely unable even to look at, or to approach the place [*topos*] in which the holy Mariamne was, but all of them ran away from her.[23]

Here the use of 'the place', *o topos*, is specific, and the theophanic element more sharply emphasized. Not only do we have the cloud and fire, reminiscent of the descent of the glory on Sinai in Exodus 24:16–17, but the note of fear before divine manifestation that is also familiar from biblical narratives, of being unable to look at or approach 'the place' of God, together with that of the body of the ascetic as the Ark itself, not only throne or footstool, but here the very container, the vessel of the divine light and fire, fully transparent to the Presence which fills it.

I have cited these apocrypha, and not the more familiar works of such famous pre-Nicene Fathers as Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, or Methodius of Olympus, because their very sophistication, particularly the engagement of the last three named with late antique philosophy, has tended to disguise their roots in the biblical theology I have been sketching. They are in consequence often read as Platonists *tout court*, or at least as advancing a platonically corrupted version of Christianity. This impression is mostly false, but rather than taking the pains necessary to 'unpack' their thought, I believe that the two passages I cite, thanks to their innocence of at least philosophical sophistication (though they are not unsophisticated in other ways), serve to illustrate my argument more easily. It is surely clear that these texts are about as far away as can be imagined from a supposed Christian asceticism that is platonically inspired, and that denies the body. The latter's vocation is rather to become, as Thekla and Mariamne illustrate, the very 'body of the glory', 'conformed to' and indeed manifesting 'the body of his [Christ's] glory', as St Paul puts it in Philippians 3:21. Furthermore, the evocation, implicit in Thekla's transformation and explicit in Mariamne's, of the theology of *hammaqom*, wedded to the traditions of theophany and temple, points towards the origins of much Christian doctrine, and especially of Christian ascetical theology, in those same traditions. Put bluntly, one would do much better to approach the wellsprings of our ascetico-mystical literature by beginning with Exodus and Leviticus, rather than with the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*. Certainly, there are many good things in Plato, and Christians happily availed themselves of him, but their roots are in Zion, not the Academy. Odd and frankly marginal as many of these apocrypha doubtless are, their thought derives essentially from Israel, and they lead thus naturally to things I want to emphasize in the next section.

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[23] *Acta Philipi* 126; in Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* 2.2, and pp. 55:9–56:1 and 55:23–56:21. I have taken the liberty here of conflating two slightly differing MS variants.

'The Place' and Early Monasticism in Egypt and Syria

1. Egypt: 'The Visibility of God in the Holy Man' and 'the Place' Within

There has been scholarly controversy over the past century and more about the portrait of the 'father of monks' in St Athanasius of Alexandria's famous and hugely influential *Life of Antony.*[24] The controversy has centred chiefly on chapter 14 of the *Life*, where its hero emerges from the isolation of his abandoned fort to begin the miracle-studded ministry of healing, counselling, and intercession that occupies the rest of the book. Athanasius writes that Antony comes forth 'as it were, like an initiate [lit., 'mystagogized', *memystagogoumenos*] as from some inner shrine [*eis en adytois*]', and goes on to describe the saint's physical condition as perfect, neither fat nor thin, and his mental state as in complete equilibrium, neither giddy nor depressed. He is wholly sane, completely 'natural'– or, literally, 'in the [state] which is according to nature' (*en to kata physin*). Miracles promptly follow, and the onlookers are 'amazed' (*ethaumazon*), while Antony himself continually gives credit to Christ who is working through him.[25] Without going into detail about the scholarly controversy, I should like to enter the suggestion that, beneath a vocabulary that on occasion, and surely for apologetic reasons (Antony is elsewhere seen besting the philosophers in debate), deliberately recalls the *Lives* of Pythagoras and other pagan 'divine men' (*theoi andres*), Athanasius is drawing on exactly the theology of the 'place' and its associated traditions of temple and theophany that I have been dealing with. Antony, in sum, emerges from his cell as from the Holy of Holies, from the 'place' of the Presence, and, like the high priest in Ecclesiasticus 50, has become himself the manifestation of that 'place' and Presence. He is 'fully natural' because he has regained the image and likeness that were Adam's before the Fall.[26] Details further on in the *Life*, notably the little garden Antony makes on his beloved mountain (and recall Paradise as a mountain in Ezek. 28:14) and his harmony with the wild animals, consciously echo the same point: here, in this man, we find Paradise regained. I stress the 'in': Antony is himself the realization of Paradise, the presence of the 'heavenly man', Christ, and around him the world arranges itself in consequence as the renewed likeness of Eden.

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[24] See S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, 1995), esp. pp. 126–44 on the *Vita Antonii*, including a review of prior scholarship and controversy.

The same notes of theophany and recovery of Paradise recur again and again throughout the literature of the Egyptian desert. Abba Pambo is at one point depicted as recovering, in so many words, 'the image of the glory of Adam [...] his face shone like lightning, and he was as a king seated upon his throne.'[27] Abba Arsenios is seen wrapped in divine flame; Abba Silouanos ascends to the throne in heaven and looks upon the glory there, and his face, too, shines with the light of God; Abba Sisoes's countenance is similarly illumined, and he dies amidst the company of the heavenly host, with lightning-flash and unearthly fragrance; Abba Joseph of Panephysis counsels becoming 'all flame', and accompanies his advice with a practical demonstration. Also, like the 'holy temples' who are the sainted ascetics in the *Acts of Thomas*, Abbas Poimen and Sisoes similarly display the authority to forgive sins, while Abba Makarios the Great is called at one point a 'god on earth' (*epigeios theos*), because he 'covered the sins of the brethren'. Abba Bessarion hints at becoming like the cherubim of Ezekiel's *merkavah*, as do Abba Ammonas, Antony's disciple, and – explicitly and at length in far-off Mesopotamia – the anonymous author of the *Macarian Homilies*.[28] I could go on, but these examples (admittedly the most spectacular in the normally cautious and sober *Apophthegmata Patrum*) all speak to pretty much the same network of associations with 'the place' that we have been dealing with throughout. The holy old men, the *gerontes* or elders of the desert, make God visible. They are *hammaqom hazzeh*. They are 'theology' in their transfigured persons, and their words – recall the request, 'Elder, give me a word', that appears repeated throughout the *Apophthegmata*, together with the responses which comprise the reason for the assembly of these stories and sayings – are therefore also theology, endowed with power, just as their speakers are themselves true theologians.[29]

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[25] *Vita Antonii* 14, *PG* 26.865C.

[26] For the expression, 'all the glory of Adam' in the Scrolls, see 1QS 4.23 and 1QHa 4.15, available in facing Hebrew and English in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, ed. F. Garcia Martinez and E.J.C. Tigehelaar (Leiden, 1997), volume 1, pp. 78–9 and 148–9, resp. For discussion of temple traditions along the lines I am suggesting with regard to Antony, i.e. the overtones of the high priest coming forth from the Holy of Holies as theophanic, and the reference to Simon the high priest in Ecclesiasticus 50, see C.H.T. Fletcher-Louis, 'The Worship of Divine Humanity as God's Image and the Worship of Jesus', in C.C. Newman, J.R. Davila, and G.S. Lewis (eds), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, (Leiden/Boston/Köln, 1999), pp. 112–28, esp. 115–19; and cf. M. Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 34–49.

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[27] Pambo 12, *PG* 65.372A

[28] For transformation into light or fire, vision of the glory, see Arsenios 27, *PG* 65.96BC; Silouanos 3 (409A; and cf. 12, 412C); Sisoes 14 (396BC); and Joseph of Panephysis 7 (229CD). For the authority to forgive sins or, in Makarios's case, to 'cover' them, see Poemen 12, *PG* 65.325A; Sisoes 20 (400AB); and Makarios of Egypt 32 (273D). For references to the chariot throne, and the intimation or express statement that this is the Christian calling, see Bessarion 11 (141D); Ammonas, Epistle 13, *Patrologia Orientalis* 11, 602:3–603:8; and the opening paragraphs in the first Macarian homily in Collection II: *Die 50 geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, ed. H. Dörries, E. Klostermann, and M. Kröger (Berlin, 1964), esp. 2:23–3:31.

It is with the greatest and most influential thinker of the early Egyptian desert, Evagrios of Pontus (d. 399), that we also find the most explicit and profound evocation of 'the place'. This occurs several times in his works, as noted recently in a remarkable article by Columba Stewart. We find Evagrios on the subject at perhaps greatest length in the following passage from his letter 39:

> If by the grace of God the intellect [*nous*] both turns away [from the passions] and puts off the old man, then it will also see its own constitution at the time of prayer, like a sapphire or the colour of heaven, which recalls as well what Scripture calls 'the place of God' [Exod. 24:10, LXX] seen by the elders on Mount Sinai. For another heaven is imprinted on a pure heart, because within it so much is seen: the meaning of beings, and the holy angels who sojourn with the worthy.[30]

Here 'the place' is fully and deliberately interiorized, such that it is the sanctified intellect which expressly becomes the site of revelation. It becomes, indeed, Sinai within, or, as this writer brings out elsewhere, the intellect becomes the altar of the Christian as temple, ready to receive the descent and abiding of the glory, 'the blessed light of the Holy Trinity', to use Evagrios's own, repeated phrase.[31] In his illuminating article, Stewart devotes much space to the theological and psycho-spiritual subtleties – even genius – of the use of 'the place' here, and that space is well-spent.[32] I heartily recommend the article. What Fr Columba misses, however, and what I want to emphasize, is that Evagrios is the assuredly conscious heir of a long and unbroken tradition regarding 'the place'. Neither in the passage I quoted, nor where he mentions it elsewhere, does Evagrios feel obliged to explain in detail what he means by his use of the phrase, *topos theou*. Rather, he expects his monastic readers to recognize it, and only then to ponder the particular emphasis he wishes to give to it, notably his stress on interiorization, and his concomitant polemic – which I shall not go into here – against theological anthropomorphism, especially as based on visionary experience.[33] He was not the first to insist on these particular emphases either, but to demonstrate that, we shall have to travel back in time over two generations, and in space nearly a thousand miles to the north-east.

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[29] Thus the famous dictum of Evagrios: 'If you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian.' From his 'On Prayer' 60, in J.E. Bamberger, trans., *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo, 1981), p. 65. Greek in *PG* 79.1180B.

[30] Epistle 39, in W. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus* (Berlin, 1912), p. 593, translating from Frankenberg's Greek retroversion of the Syriac translation. For like echoes of Exod. 24:10, together with Ps. 75:3 (Zion) and the 'place of God', in Evagrios, see his *Skemmata* 2, 4, 23, and 25 in J. Muyldermans, 'Evagriana: Note Additionelle', *Le Muséon*, 44 (1931), 374 and 376–7; English in W. Harmless and R.R. Fitzgerald, 'The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The *Skemmata* of Evagrius Ponticus', *Theological Studies*, 52 (2001), 498–529, here 521 and 525–6.

[31] See again *Skemmata* 2, 4, 27 (Muyldermans 374 and 377; Harmless/Fitzgerald 521 and 526); Epistles 17 (Frankenberg 579), 34 (593), and 58 (609); and *On the Eight Evil Thoughts* 8, in *PG* 79.1221B. For citation and discussion of the several texts, see A. Guillaumont, 'La vision de l'intellect par lui même dans la mystique évagrienne', *Mélanges Université Saint Joseph*, 50.1 (1984), 255–62;

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and H.Veit-Beyer, 'Die Lichtlehre der Mönche des vierzehnten und der vierten Jahrhunderts, erörtet am Beispiel des Gregorios Sinaites, des Evagrios Pontikos, und des Pseudo-Makarios/Symeon', *Jahrbuch der österreichichen Byzantinistik*, 31.1 (1981), 473–512; both of whom read Evagrios's use of light in an exclusively Neoplatonist context. For an important argument against this Hellenistic fixation, see the unfortunately neglected study by N. Séd, 'La *shekinta* et ses amis araméens', *Cahiers d'Orientalisme*, 20 (1988), 233–42, which places Evagrios's use of Exod. 24:10 and Ps. 75:3, together with his invocation of light and 'the place', in a thoroughly Semitic and biblical context, just as I have been doing throughout this essay.

[32] C. Stewart, 'Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrios Ponticus', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 9.2 (2001), 173–204, esp. 191–8.

[33] See A. Golitzin, '"The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God's Glory in a Form": Controversy over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth-, Early Fifth-Century Monastic Literature', *Studia Monastica*, 44.2 (2002), 13–43, and 28–31 on Evagrios particularly. Relatedly, see also idem, 'The Vision of God and Form of the Glory: Reflections on the Anthropomorphite Controversy of A.D. 399', in A. Louth, J. Behr and D. Conomos (eds), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West. Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* (Crestwood, 2003), pp. 267–91, together with the bibliography of sources and twentieth-century scholarship on the issue that they contain.

2. *Syria-Mesopotamia: Aphrahat of Persia on the Christian Sage; The 'Place' Within*

Aphrahat the Persian sage lived, it seems, in the eastern mountains of what is now Iraqi Kurdistan. In the 330s and 340s he wrote twenty-three *Demonstrations*, treatises on the ascetical life and related matters.[34] His language was Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, and it is not clear that he knew of any of the prior Greek church Fathers, let alone the great philosophers of classical and post-classical Greece. Greek (or Latin) Christians did not know of Aphrahat either. In late antiquity only the Armenians troubled to translate him, while his appearance in Western languages belongs exclusively to the past century or so. Yet it is this very isolation, and the almost entirely Semitic environment in which he lived and thought, that make him so valuable a witness to traditions that he holds in common with his fellow Christians in the Roman West, especially the ascetics. In what follows I shall quote selections from a long passage that he devotes to the typical ascetic saint, whom he calls 'the sage', *hakkima*, like the rabbinic *hakkam*.[35] In such a one divine wisdom 'depicts wondrous things in his heart, and the eyes of his perceptions take in the bounds of the seas. All things created are enclosed within his thought.'[36] But this is not the end: another stage awaits Aphrahat's sage as he 'becomes still more vast [i.e. than creation] [...] He becomes the great temple of his Creator. Indeed, the King of the Heights enters and dwells in him.'[37]

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[34] For the Syriac text of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, with facing Latin translation, see the edition by D.I. Parisot, *Patrologia Syriaca*, volumes 1 (Paris, 1894) and 2 (Paris, 1894), columns 1–150; and for a complete French translation, together with extensive introduction, M.-J. Pierre (ed.), *Aphraate le sage persan: les Exposés*, in *Sources chrétiennes* 349 and 350 (Paris, 1988).

[35] *Demonstration* 14.35, *Patrologia Syriaca* 1, cols. 660:23–665:9. On possible contacts between Aphrahat and the rabbis of the surrounding, large Jewish population, see esp. N. Koltun-Fromm, 'A Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Iran', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 47 (1996), 45–63.

[36] *Demonstration* 14.35, col. 661:13–15.

[37] Ibid. 661:17–19.

The divine indwelling reveals in turn the entirety of heaven, together with heaven's Lord, enshrined within the sage, who

> [...] gazes on that place [*haw atra*] and contemplates it, and his mind is stupefied by all that it sees: all the watchers hastening to his ministry, the seraphim chanting the thrice-holy to his glory, flying swiftly with their wings, their faces covered at his radiance, their courses swifter than the wind. There, too, is the throne of the Kingdom established, the Judge makes ready the place of judgement.[38]

Aphrahat goes on to conclude:

> When he gives from what is his, he is no whit the less, and the poor are made wealthy from his treasure. There is no limit to his mind, which is gathered up and lodged in his inner being. The place [*atra*] where the King dwells and is ministered to, who could calculate its treasures for you? Many are its affairs and expenses, as with a king for whom nothing lacks.[39]

This passage is surely one of the most stunning, and one of the most overlooked, in all early Christian literature.[40] It deserves a monograph. Here I must confine myself to the following observations: first, the Syriac word *atra* functions in translations of the Scripture exactly as does the Greek *topos*. Both render the Hebrew *maqom*. Second, Aphrahat builds the entire, remarkable description on a selective repetition of this word. The passage begins with questions about 'the place', ends by identifying it as 'the place where the King dwells', with both beginning and end turning around the central section where the sage gazes on 'that place' (*haw atra*).[41] Third, 'the place' is emphatically sited within the sage, in his heart (*lebba*), or mind (*ray'ana*), or inner being (*'ubba*), which in consequence becomes 'more vast' than all creation, indeed infinite, 'without limit'. Note, incidentally, the equation he assumes here between 'mind', 'intellect' (*tar'ita*), and 'heart'. This will reappear in the *Macarian Homilies* two generations later, and I think that it might say something as well about the supposed 'intellectualism' of even Evagrios.[42] Fourth, the Syriac grammar of the central verses describing the heavenly liturgy before the throne discloses an astonishing fact. The third-person, masculine singular suffixes attached to 'ministry' (*tešmešta*), 'glory' (*iqara*), and 'radiance' (*ziwa*) all have the sage as their closest antecedent.[43] It is therefore to him that the angelic watchers minister, his glory that the seraphim celebrate with the *trisagion*, and his radiance from which they shield their faces. In all Christian literature, I know of no bolder statement of what Greek theologians were calling *theosis*, deification, though that word itself, or some equivalent, is lacking in Aphrahat. In sum, the ascetic saint is fully 'the place' of Christ, in whom all created space and time are reconciled and united, above and below, the beginning and the end, paradise and the world to come. All is here, in 'this place'.

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[38] Ibid. 661:24–664:10.

[39] Ibid. 664:24–55 (the allusion to 1 Cor. 2:9) and 665:3–9.

[40] I know of only two scholars even to have touched on this passage. The first was Sr. Juana Raasch, 'The Monastic Concept of Purity of Heart and Its Sources', *Studia Monastica*, 11.2 (1969), 269–314, here 279–81, where she finds parallels between *Dem.* 14.35, as well as 6.1 and 9.4, on the one hand, and 1 *Enoch* 14, on the other. The second, more recent and more important, is Robert Murray. See his article, 'Some Themes and Problems of Early Syriac Angelology', in R. Lavenant (ed.), *V Symposium Syriacum* (Rome, 1990), pp. 143–53, here 150–3, to which I owe several insights, in particular the grammatical point I note below, together with his comparison of Aphrahat's description of the transfigured sage to the rabbinic-era, *hekhalot* text, *Sefer Hekhalot* or *3 Enoch*. For P. Alexander's English translation of the latter, see J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, 1983), volume 1, pp. 255–315, esp. Enoch's transformation into Metatron in chapters 7–15, pp. 262–7. See also the preliminary analysis offered in my article, 'Recovering the "Glory of Adam": "Divine Light" Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of Fourth-Century Syro-Mesopotamia', in J.R. Davila (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Post-Biblical Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden/New York, 2002), pp. 275–308, here 295–301.

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[41] 'Place', *atra*, thus appears at the beginning (660:23 and 25), middle ('that place', 661:24, and 'the place of many treasures', 664:11), and end ('the place where the King dwells', 665:6).

[42] For discussion of this point, and accompanying references to Macarius, see A. Golitzin, 'A Testimony to Christianity as Transfiguration: The Macarian Homilies and Orthodox Spirituality', in S.T. Kimbrough (ed.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, 2002), pp. 129–56, here 130–2; and for caution regarding the supposed 'intellectualism' of Evagrios himself, see the forceful arguments advanced by G. Bunge in W. Nyssen (ed.), 'Nach dem Intellekt Leben? Zum sogenannten "Intellektualismus" der evagrianischen Spritualität', *Simandron, der Wachklopfer: Gedankenschrift für Klaus Gember*, (Köln, 1989), pp. 95–109; and idem, 'Erschaffen und erneuert nach dem Bild Gottes: Zu den biblisch-theologischen und sakramentalen Grundlagen der evagrianischen Mystik', in C. Brinker von der Heide and N. Largier (eds), *Homo Medietas: Festschrift für Alois Maria Haas* (Berlin/Frankfurt/New York, 1999), pp. 27–41.

[43] Here is the crucial point that I owe to R. Murray, 'Some Problems in Early Syriac Angelology', pp. 151–2.

Perhaps I might sum up both Aphrahat on the sage and his contemporaries in early monastic Egypt on the *geron*, together with the generations of their predecessors, by quoting Fr Aimilianos at the end of a five-minute, off-the-cuff talk he gave for German television just over twenty years ago. He provides a brief, theological summary of monasticism, and concludes with the role of the abbot, or spiritual father:

> The spiritual father is therefore, in fact, the same who takes his disciple, the monk, by the hand in order to introduce him to the Lord. He is the same who brings Christ down, who reunites that which was separated – the realities of heaven and of earth – in order to transform them into the one, unique, and genuine dance.[...] All the monks partake of this sense of the mystery, and of the mystical reality that manifests itself among them: because the Elder is not merely someone who has appeared today for the sake of the monastery, rather, he proceeds from stream of the Orthodox tradition; he springs from the living current of the Holy Spirit.
>
> Of course he [the Elder] is a man. [...] Certainly, he lives as a normal man, just as any other living man, but he is as well the one whom God has taken and set apart, and who in consequence no longer lives quite the life of the present world. While indeed he walks the earth, he senses in some manner that his head is in the sky, that he sees Heaven, that he sees God. This, indeed, is what contemporary man and his society most lack: the spiritual father who makes God so tangible, so powerful, so living, so intense, and so true.[44]

Nearly everything I have said so far is here, down to and including the 'vastness' of Aphrahat's sage, who becomes 'large' enough to connect heaven and earth. But should this be a surprise? Aimilianos, after all, is one in the same current as Aphrahat, Evagrios, the abbas of the desert, and all their predecessors and successors in the river of life, including the other contemporary elders discussed in this volume. All are part of what St Symeon the New Theologian calls the 'golden chain'.[45]

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[44] 'The Role of the Spiritual Father in an Orthodox Monastery', in A. Golitzin (trans. and ed.), *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain: Contemporary Voices from Mount Athos* (South Canaan, PA, 1996), pp. 165–7, here 167.

There is of course much more that could be said about the way in which this 'golden chain' continues in later writers such as St Ephrem the Syrian, Jacob of Serug, and Dionysius the Areopagite, and in anonymous works such as the *Macarian Homilies* and the *Liber graduum*, to name what seem to me to be most important examples – but space does not permit me to develop this continuity further.

Aimilianos of Simonopetra: 'the Place'

'The Authentic Seal' Impressed on Dry and Crumbling Wax

In suggesting its roots, associations, continuum, and outline of the idea of 'the place' I have to the best of my limited ability also traced something of the shape of my father in God as theologian, and as himself theology. Others who have known him might protest that I have spent very little space on Fr Aimilianos himself, other than the relatively few citations from his published works which have appeared at different and – I hope – strategic points in the course of this exposition. I am aware of my failing, and freely admit the justice of protest. I answer it, weakly enough, by noting that this was not quite how I intended my essay to proceed, but that the latter took on its own shape and momentum as I wrote. What has emerged is certainly not biography, nor yet the theological reminiscence I promised (or threatened, but I am not yet done), but it does represent, I think, something of my elder's thought, of his stamp as it has impressed itself on me. I am not such stuff as would or could take a fully adequate impression of that original. I am wax already dried and cracked, but even so I can hope that something of his outlines has appeared. If one were to take the four volumes of his talks published by the nuns of Ormylia, and read through them, one would find what I have tried to indicate here: the great themes and images of God's dwelling in biblical Israel, Eden, and Sinai, Zion, the ark of the covenant, tabernacle, temple, the chariot throne, and the abiding of the Name; their fulfilment in the incarnation of that Presence and Name and glory in the Lord Jesus Messiah, and in the gift of his life, the Holy Spirit, in the Church of the prophets, apostles, martyrs, teachers, and ascetics whom we meet, together with all the company of heaven, in the Liturgy, in the Church Fathers, in the *Synaxaria*, and in the labours and revelations of prayer in our 'closets', alone with God alone.[46] To be sure, this elder deploys on occasion the technical language of the great dogmas defined at ecumenical and local synods, and he does so with perfect ease and reverence, but always with the equally perfect understanding, which he shares with the Holy Fathers who fashioned the language of the dogmas, that this entire, wonderful, dizzying panoply of polysyllabic abstractions – all those ousias and hypostases and prosopas and energeias, with all their permutations, subtleties, and distinctions finer than the veriest hair – were confected precisely in order, if I may paraphrase an expression of the rabbis, 'to set a fence around the Mystery', that is, to protect and serve the substantial truth of these fundamental images and never – but never! – to replace them.

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[45] In the 'vastness' of the glorified saint, who spans the gulf dividing heaven from earth and becomes in a sense larger than the world, we may find something of an explanation for the stories of contemporary saints who can 'sense' or even 'see' things happening at great distances or across time. Thus, for example, we find the 'spiritual sight' and ubiquity of the intellect that, in this volume, Abbot Ephraim lists among Elder Joseph the Hesychast's *charismata*, or the similar wonders reported of the late Elder Porphyrios of Oropos. Regarding the latter and the collapsing of time and space for the saints, see K. Ioannidis, *Elder Porphyrios: Testimonies and Experiences* (Athens, 1997), perhaps esp. the narratives and commentary included in the following pages: 59–60, 103–4, 117, 136–48, 171–9, 219–21, 267–8, 295–6.

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[46] See again the references above and below to the several talks with evocations of the scriptural themes of the chariot, tabernacle, temple, Sinai, the Upper Room, the union of men and angels and saints; and see also his comparison of the monastic estate to a tabernacle looking ever to the 'image of the Glory of God' in his 'Address Delivered during the Enthronement Ceremony at the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra', *The Authentic Seal*, pp. 93–104, here 94–6; his evocation of the angelic choirs in 'A Choir Equal to the Angels', ibid., pp. 147–51; or his comparison of the young monks on Athos to Moses carrying the sacred vessels of the Tabernacle on his way to the Land of the Promise, in 'Walk in Newness', ibid., pp. 370–7, here 370, as well as in the same talk his insistence on the 'essential, eschatological dimension of our church life' (371), and his description (375) of the monks flocking 'together from various nations, with different languages, local traditions, levels of education, social status in order to experience in one Body, "in one place" [citing the *epi to auto* of Acts 2:1 and 44], the presence of God, and so the monastery where they gather is transformed automatically and permanently into the Upper Room of Pentecost and into a new Jerusalem, identified with the Catholic Church of Christ'.

Fr Aimilianos lives and breathes the world of the holy Scriptures, as did his fathers before him to the beginning. His talks comprise what is virtually an extended seminar on biblical exegesis, though not by way of dryly academic exposition, but rather through the constant interplay – or simply, the play – of the holy books with the Liturgy, the dogmas, and the saints who have embodied the revelation made once and for all to Israel. Equally, there is much that I have missed out, chiefly the presence of that other mountain of revelation, Golgotha, which at once stands opposite and merges mysteriously with the Tabor of the transfiguration, and around which two poles, the rhythms of the life in faith, turn. By this, I mean the elder's analyses of the struggles of prayer, the confrontations with sin, the mysteries of repentance and tears.[47] I do not write of these things because I have not assimilated them in the way that I have been taken, at least intellectually, by those things more obviously bright. Such, I dare say, is the sign of the child in matters spiritual, attracted to what is clearly wonderful and shining, as opposed to one who has grown 'into the measure of the stature' of Christ, and for whom the 'nuts and bolts' of the spiritual life, the daily struggles with sin, are of greater and more pressing concern. Here the wax of my character shows up at its most cracked and dry.

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[47] This is perhaps most strikingly on display in the elder's extraordinary 'Catechism on Prayer', *The Authentic Seal*, pp. 191–230, where he also comes closest to what I take to be an autobiographical reminiscence of the experience of God. For the confrontation with sin and ego – though note that this takes place in the light of God's presence – (thus the mysterious merging of Tabor and Golgotha), see esp. pp. 211–21.

I am reminded of something I asked Fr Aimilianos once, when he looked into my cell to see if I was doing the work on my dissertation that he had ordered me to do (and that my long-suffering supervisor at Oxford had long since despaired of ever seeing from me). 'Elder', I asked, 'is this work I am doing' – for luckily he had caught me on one of the rare occasions when I was actually at work – 'of any value spiritually? Can it bring me any closer to God?' He said, and the words are not exact since I remember only the gist: 'Yes. If you do it well and truly, it will bring you to a certain vision of God. You will glimpse him in the way that you see starlight reflected off the sea.' 'But how', I persisted, 'does that compare with how I might see him if I stayed in the monastery as one of your monks?' 'Oh!' he said, 'Then he would appear to you like the sun at midday!'

Yet I decided to go back into 'the world', as the Athonites say; nor have I regretted that decision. Everything that I had ever wanted to have and to do, I have had and done – save only one or two that I later realized I was much better off without. All decisions have consequences, however, and in this case it is the image of Fr Aimilianos which must be affected by that choice twenty-five years ago. He therefore appears reflected only faintly and partially through me, like the light of stars broken up and dimmed by the shifting surface of a faulty memory and, more so, of a limited understanding. Yet what there is of that understanding, of that reflection, dim as it may be, is still powerful enough to have shaped, and to continue to shape, my past and present research and writing. Permit me, then, to dwell a little longer, and by way of a slightly extended conclusion, on a couple of the theological reminiscences that I promised some while back, in the hope that they will serve to bring into relief certain of the outlines of my elder, and particularly of his mystagogy.

Reminiscences of Theological Discovery

1. March 1998: 'Your Mercy Shall Go Before Me'

In late March of 1998 I arrived at the monastery of Simonopetra to spend a month of my sabbatical year. I was flush with new discoveries, having just stumbled on the possibilities offered by intertestamental literature, particularly in light of the studies on Jewish mysticism that were carrying on in the train of the late Gershom Scholem, for arguing the continuities of Orthodox theology and spirituality by demonstrating their certain foundations in the traditions of pre-Christian Israel. It seemed to me, as it still appears, that affinities between the stress on transfiguration that characterizes Orthodoxy, on the one hand, and the early Jewish mysticism of the *merkavah*, on the other, pointed towards trajectories running back in parallel into common sources in the apocalypses and wisdom literature of the Second Temple era.[48] I was carrying with me the translation of Jacob of Serug's long, long homily on Ezekiel's chariot (my Syriac homework for the better part of a year), which struck me as a confirmation of my new thesis, and wonderfully like – though in a totally different idiom – Jacob's contemporary, Dionysius, whom I was seeing more clearly than ever before as a representative of the Great Tradition. I was therefore immensely excited, and eager to talk about these things with as many of the brethren at the monastery as had the time and patience to listen to me.

At first I was disappointed. A couple of the fathers to whom I poured out my discoveries did not react to them with the enthusiasm I had expected. They frowned, shook their heads, and expressed serious concern for me. 'What is this?' they asked, 'Jewish? And this chariot business? What does it have to do with Christ?' 'Be careful!' they warned, 'You might be putting yourself into spiritual danger!' Somewhat chastened, I withdrew from fervent advocacy, though still nursing the conviction that my new direction was not wholly mistaken.

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[48] For a very preliminary sketch of this thesis, see my essay, 'Spirituality: Eastern Christian', in. W.M. Johnston (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Monasticism* (Chicago, 2001), volume 2, pp.1185–91. For Scholem, see esp. his seminal *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941, rep. New York, 1973), and *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and the Talmudic Tradition* (New York, 1960, rev. edn. 1967); together with I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkabah Mysticism* (Leiden, 1980).

Confirmation came from an unexpected direction, and it brought with it a renewed discovery of my debt to Fr Aimilianos. Shortly after I had arrived, the monastery received copies of the second volume of the elder's talks, which all the fathers, including me, began promptly to read. The others read more quickly than I, who am still obliged to plough slowly through Greek. Not long after the book's appearance, the two fathers who had shaken their heads stopped by my cell. 'Have you read the elder's talk on "The Throne of God"?' they asked, 'Or his "We have found Paradise"?' 'No', I said, 'I have not got that far yet.' 'Oh', they said, 'but you must keep going! He sounds just like what you were talking about the other day! So maybe you are on to something good!' One of them, a native anglophone, asked if he could read my translation of Jacob. A little stunned by this reversal, I lent him my copy (which he later pronounced wonderful – that is, not my English, which he kindly corrected, but Jacob himself), and, as soon as he had left, I snatched up Fr Aimilianos's book, flipping through it to the talk on the 'Throne' which they had singled out. It was a sermon given at Volos in 1986, a public thing, not like one of the more involved talks given to his monks or nuns, or deploying the more elevated language he reserved for gatherings of university theologians.[49] This was for ordinary believers. Its language was simple. Yet reading it was like encountering my own discoveries reflected back at me, though with a power and mastery I have never had. I was stunned, thrilled, speechless for a time, and shaken. 'This is wonderful', I thought, 'but how can it be? True, this talk is not addressing the history of ideas angle that I am exploring. There is no elaborate apparatus of footnotes and scholarly argument. But still, everything that I want to say positively is here, and "here" is moreover a sermon given ten years before I had even begun to glimpse the things which preoccupy me now.'

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[49] 'O Thronos tou Theou', *Zoi en Pneumati*, pp. 360–84.

Then the obvious began to dawn on me, that of course it was not Fr Aimilianos who was reflecting me, but rather I who was coming more and more, in my head at least, to reflect him. At one of the weekday vespers, I forget which, we sing the psalm verse, 'Your mercy, O Lord, shall go before me.' The Greek verb in the verse has always struck me as meaning something more like 'will get there beforehand', 'will anticipate'. God's mercy anticipates us. We arrive at something, and then find on reflection that what we had thought was the product of our own labour was in fact the working of Providence, that God's hand, invisible at the time, had been at work directing us, so that what we had thought was all ours was really his. So it was with me five years ago. I saw yet again, with increased clarity and gratitude, that I had been guided steadily by the mind of my father in God, that it was he, his shape, that I was coming more and more to discern in the course of my studies. My own work had indeed been mine, coming from freely willed decisions to pursue what I was pursuing, but that invisible hand had been there all along.

Such is the mark, I think, of a truly graced pedagogy. I am reminded of a story from a collection of materials on Mount Athos that came out in English a few years ago. The speaker, unnamed in the book because he was still alive at the time, is the late Papa Ephraim of Katounakia, one of Athos's saints in the late twentieth century. He tells of his experiences learning from the miraculous Elder Joseph the Hesychast, and of how the old man directed him, summing up the latter's method as follows:

> In order to understand this, you have to have lived it. That's why Father [Joseph] never tried to go in front of me in order to lead me. Instead, he let me go ahead alone and then helped me afterwards to understand what I had experienced.[50]

Now Papa Ephraim was a holy man, learning from another holy man. Fr Aimilianos is a holy man too, but I most certainly am not. Papa Ephraim is talking here about the experience of God, the sun at midday, while I have in mind a certain something glimpsed at night by the reflection of flickering stars. Nonetheless, the *modus operandi* of both Frs Joseph and Aimilianos strikes me as essentially the same. Neither one forces himself on his disciple. Neither bruises in any way the sovereign freedom of his child, whom he recognizes always as a bearer of the image of the King. Yet both do lead or shape the child, less by what they say than by what they are. They create the conditions for the child's growth, and then allow him or her to grow. Their words of direction are few, specific, and freighted often with depths that disclose themselves to the child's startled recognition only much later.

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[50] 'A Contemporary Athonite Paterikon', in *The Living Witness of the Holy Mountain*, p. 150.

When I look back on my conversations with Fr Aimilianos, I find that I have perfect recall of his practical remarks, and of his rebukes, but that I remember nothing of his properly theological statements, save those few that I jotted down in my notebook immediately on getting back to my cell. Sometimes, what he had just said would disappear from my memory before I could get to the notebook. One time he asked me, 'What does liturgy mean?', and then went on for the next ten minutes or so to unfold the Church's theology of worship, doing so with a grace and command that left me open-mouthed. I remember the scene perfectly, just as I remember his question at the beginning and my amazement at the end, but I can recall absolutely nothing of what he said in between, and I seem to recall that this amnesia overtook me minutes after leaving his company. Did his words then escape me entirely, flow through me and out and away for ever? Or did they run past my conscious awareness to rest somewhere in the neurons of the back brain, entwined with the fabric of my unconscious mind, and wait to disclose their pattern much later, in the way that we occasionally 'recognize' something familiar, suddenly discover it, and then watch, startled, as it arranges itself into a new and unexpected meaning and coherence? I rather think that the latter is the case, and I further suggest that this is a general characteristic of encounters with 'the place' of God's presence, which is any meeting with a saint: that we take away from them consciously only what we can bear at the time, which in my case was very little indeed, but that the memory lodges itself at some deeper level, there to work its effect on us, hiddenly, until such time – if we deserve it, and if grace permits – as it can show itself openly.

This was very much the pattern of my initial contacts with Fr Aimilianos over twenty years before the spring of 1998. They were bound up with the efforts of a graduate student of theology who was trying, intermittently, to write a dissertation about a figure from the Church's distant past whom he neither liked nor, as he came despairingly to realize, at all understood. Two years in Greece, the first spent partially at the monastery of Simonopetra and the second, at the invitation of its abbot, entirely there, were necessary for him to clarify that particular mystery and, as it turned out, more besides. This brings me to the last part of this overlong essay, an account of Fr Aimilianos's mystagogy as seen through the eyes of that frustrated graduate student. I shall make my conclusions out of my beginnings.

2. November 1976 to July 1978: the Mystagogy of 'God's Aimilianos'

I first met Fr Aimilianos on my initial visit to his monastery in November 1976, and I was not impressed. I had come to Greece, and specifically to Mount Athos, because I had heard of him from another graduate student of theology who had told me how meeting him had changed his life. The change was visible. A dapper young sophisticate from Athens, charming and slightly cynical, had metamorphosed from the last time I had seen him into a hairy apparition, all beard and unshorn locks and cassock, rising at midnight to pray (which I knew since he had kindly put me up for a night when I had business in London, and he accidentally woke me up). I was quite struck at the time, and it was the memory of this episode a few months later that contributed to my decision to go and live for a time in Greece and try to visit Mount Athos as often as I could. Other reasons for going included my growing desperation with a doctoral thesis (of which more later) that appeared to be going nowhere, coupled with a crisis of faith. The two, in fact, the still-born dissertation on Dionysius the Areopagite, and a growing scepticism that had begun to wonder if the glorious words of Orthodox theology were no more than words, however pretty, were related and mutually reinforcing. So, like fifty generations of Orthodox pilgrims before me, though doubtless set up more comfortably than most of them were obliged to travel, I set off for the Holy Mountain armed with my supervisor's blessing (what did he have to lose, after all? Nothing else was happening) and a fellowship courtesy of the Church of Greece, looking forward to my meeting with a holy man who would solve my problems.

And he did, beyond my fondest expectations, though not immediately. Quite to the contrary, my first impressions were a great disappointment. I saw a man who was a little below medium height, not quite stout but close to it, who held himself upright, putting out his hand to be kissed by his monks and admirers. To me he looked and acted like yet another Levantine *pater familias*, a type I had become all too familiar with, thanks to the already accumulated hours spent cooling my heels in the antechambers of assorted ecclesiastical personages in Greece, only to be ushered eventually into the presence in order to observe the expected obsequies, while being afflicted yet again with an office decor that more often than not featured a distressing combination of Ottoman pullman car and Byzantine kitsch (peacock feathers, flocked wallpaper, and furniture done up in Greek crosses, grape clusters, and double-headed eagles in bas-relief). Then, too, I was a member of the Vietnam generation, a product of the 1960s, and I shared with my contemporaries a suspicion of authority bordering on the pathological.

But the monastery attracted me. Something obviously good was going on there. The first attraction was entirely aesthetic. For one of Russian background, as I am, church services simply have to be beautiful, and they were decidedly not beautiful twenty-six years ago on Athos. While the church edifices were gorgeous with brass and precious metals and ancient frescos, the services were all too often hours and hours of muttered *kyrie eleisons* and garbled psalms. Here, though the building itself was relatively unimpressive, the singing was crisply splendid and the offices celebrated with elegance and economy, mercifully shorn of the interminable add-ons common in other Athonite houses at the time. Then, secondly, the young monks were uniformly neat, slender, cheerful, polite, and, so far as I could tell, agreeably sane. Clearly, and in spite of what I thought I saw in the abbot, there was something going on that deserved further inquiry.

Subsequent visits confirmed these positive impressions, and entirely reversed my mistaken perception of Fr Aimilianos. Less than six months after I had recoiled from kissing his hand, I was joining the queue to do so. Indeed, I was ready to throw myself at his feet, and it was more than anything else his refusal to let me do anything of the kind that convinced me he was the genuine article. At the same time, and without my being aware of them, certain elements were already falling in place that would emerge a year later when, finally, I began to write. In this first year, however, impressions simply succeeded each other, one after another, without any effort on my part to put them together. They centred on three things: the monastery's common worship and daytime life, the monks' labours at prayer alone in their cells at night (which I did not witness, but which I learned about), and the figure of the abbot who, more and more clearly, I could see was at the heart of a rhythm and pattern where 'everything gleams with the radiance of the divine chariot by which God ascends and descends', and who was himself 'transformed into a chariot of the cherubim'.[51]

The Church's liturgy, the Christian's personal life of prayer in hope of the vision of God,[52] and the transfigured holy man: all three of these elements appear in the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and, with the exception of the third, have been generally recognized as important for Dionysius in the scholarly literature. The problem for modern scholarship lay in the apparent lack of co-ordination between the first and second elements. Twentieth-century scholars have been puzzled by the seeming contradiction between, on the one hand, the treatises on the hierarchies of heaven and earth, with their express insistence on mediated knowledge of God, and, on the other hand, the *Mystical*

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[51] Quoting from two of Fr Aimilianos's talks: 'everything gleams with the divine chariot' from 'Athonite Life and Human Society', and 'transformed into a chariot of the cherubim' from 'Father Dimitris Gangastathis', *The Authentic Seal*, pp. 273–97 and 233–46, resp., here 274 and 239.

[52] I am reminded of one of the abbot's talks, not yet published, that I listened in on early in my acquaintance with the monastery. 'Why did you become monks?', he asked his disciples, and went on to say, 'There is only one true reason for doing so: that you may see God!' The sentiment is repeated at the conclusion of his 'Catechism on Prayer', *The Authentic Seal*, pp. 225–8.

Theology and several passages in the *Divine Names*, with their equally express affirmation of direct access to the Mystery.[53]

This contradiction was the first of my problems as a graduate student trying to write on Dionysius: he did not appear to be coherent. Secondly, he was portrayed – with justice – as the single most blatant instance of late Neoplatonist influence in early Christian literature.[54] Given the long-standing scholarly shibboleth of a sharp contrast to be drawn between properly Christian biblicism, on the one side, and nasty Hellenistic influences, on the other – a contrast that was still very much in vogue during the early 1970s when I began my theological education – Dionysius was clearly a bad thing. He was also a fake, disguising his late Platonism behind the facade of a subapostolic pseudonym. Third and most disturbing, there was the mystery of his reception by the Church of the sixth and seventh centuries, and thereafter. He was welcomed gladly, and that welcome extended across the board of the various divisions over formal Christology that were haunting the Church of the era. Chalcedonian Orthodox, Alexandrian and West Syrian 'Monophysites', and East Syrian 'Nestorians' all loved him – to say nothing, of course, of his enormous influence on the later medieval West. This third fact troubled me greatly. How could the Eastern Christian world, I wondered, have so fallen in love with this Platonizing fraud whose thinking lacked even basic coherence?[55]

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[53] Two important and influential Dionysian scholars from the 1950s exemplify this perceived schizophrenia in his thought: R. Roques, *L'Univers Dionysien* (Paris, 1954), who deals with the hierarchies, and J. Vanneste, who takes up and seeks to debunk Dionysius's mysticism in the book, *Le Mystère de Dieu* (Brussels, 1959). The bifurcation is taken for granted by, for example, the late Fr John Meyendorff wherever the subject of Dionysius comes up in Meyendorff's many publications, e.g., *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Washington, DC, 1969), pp. 75–84, or *Introduction to Gregory Palamas*, tr. G.A. Lawrence (London, 1964), pp. 187–92 and 204–9.

[54] See the massive and still fundamental assembly of parallels between late pagan philosophy and Dionysius compiled by H. Koch, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Bezeihungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen* (Mainz, 1900).

[55] A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, tr. P.W. Watson (Philadelphia, rev. edn. 1953), here pp. 576–93, is perhaps the best-known attempt to take advantage of these

When I arrived at Simonopetra for my long stay in November of 1978, these questions were still troubling me, though they were less intense than they had been the year before. My intervening acquaintance with Athos, and specifically with Simonopetra and its abbot, had answered my questions about the truth of Christianity. I had indeed found my holy man, together with a couple of other saints of the Mountain who were alive at the time (Frs Paisios of Karyes and Ephraim of Katounakia), and the miracle they represented had put my doubts to rest. What I had not yet begun truly to grasp was that they were also the key to reading my problematic ancient writer. They were the 'missing link' that would eventually tie the *Corpus Dionysiacum* together for me and reveal its coherence. I would begin to understand that 'hierarchy' meant essentially 'liturgy' for Dionysius; that, as we saw above, it is the liturgy which shapes the soul for the encounter with God in Christ; and finally that it is the holy man who is, as it were, the embodiment of the Dionysian programme, the 'place' of God's presence, the goal towards which the shaping of the liturgy is directed. As the *Macarian Homilies* put it, 'The Church of Christ and temple of God and true altar and living sacrifice is the man of God.'

This realization dawned on me slowly, and the elements contributing to its conscious emergence were the several facets of life in the monastery, including of course the instruction – and, more importantly, simply the presence – of the abbot. Simonopetra under his direction deliberately combined features of both the coenobium and the hermitage. The former embraces life in the daytime, the round of chores, mutual service, care of guests, and most importantly the common worship in the monastery church which stands at the literal centre of the monastery. All things proceed from the altar at the heart of the physical complex. Night-time life is focused on the monk's cell, where alone with God alone he keeps vigil, says the Jesus Prayer, reads the Psalms and other Scripture, or the Fathers, and where he

several 'facts' – Platonist, fraud, and the enthusiastic reception – in order to argue for Dionysius as the sum of a betrayal of the Gospel to Greek philosophy begun by the Alexandrian divines and culminating in the necessity of the Reformation.

looks forward to the anticipation of the *eschaton* which completes his vigil: the offices in common of *mesonyktikon* and *orthros*, and the Divine Liturgy. All things here flow into the altar, which is at once thus the heart of the community, the God-intended icon of the heart of each monk, and the image-reality of Christ God himself, present in the sacrament and, equally, in the innermost shrine of the soul. In this out- and inflowing, from the altar to the world by day, and back towards the altar alone at night, we glimpse, I think, something of what is behind Dionysius's use of the Neoplatonist construct of procession (*proodos*) and return (*epistrophi*), universally recognized in the scholarly literature as basic to him, but never – to my knowledge – properly linked to its roots in Eastern Christian, spiritual tradition. This blessed arrangement was and is a deliberate artifice, a construct built out of Holy Tradition and mediated – or overseen – by the spiritual father. One can find Fr Aimilianos describing and commenting on it in detail in his published talks.[56] Here I am also immediately reminded of the title of Fr Aimilianos's recently published, fourth volume of talks, *Divine Worship: Anticipation and Vision of God*,[57] in particular the reference in the second volume to: the 'single moving and living image of the glory of Christ [...]'.[58] This is the intensification and further embodiment of the 'pattern' revealed to the God-seer on Sinai, Moses, who also saw the 'place of God' and entered into the presence.

While I cannot now enter into every detail of the process, let me sum up by saying that it was through one holy man that I came truly to see and begin to understand another holy man. Fr Aimilianos taught me how to read Dionysius the Areopagite, and is still teaching me. I keep coming back to both of them, finding always more resonances in common, more depths and mutual echoes of the great Tradition. The mode of this contemporary elder's pedagogy – or, more accurately, of his mystagogy – is itself instructive. Formal, oral teaching was always at something of a minimum, confined to a few specific suggestions, or even just hints, coupled with vastly more frequent, concrete, and apparently wholly mundane matters of detail: 'Tidy your room! There are cobwebs in the corners, and this stove is a mess!' (coming after I had voiced a highly idealized opinion of monasticism); 'Make your prostrations thus, and not so!' (after I thought I had been scrupulous in my observance of pious niceties); 'You read well, like a Greek – now study to be a Christian!' (after I had just been priding myself on my accent while reading aloud in church); etc.; etc. At least as important was the round of the monastery's life as he had organized it, blending – as I wrote above – coenobium, hermitage, and the liturgy splendidly celebrated. Thirdly, there was his example and, I have no doubt, the force of his prayers. All three acted to shape my understanding, but always with the latter allowed to unfold and to grow according to its own rhythms, in its own time. Never was there the least suggestion of compulsion, of the forced impression of the master on the disciple. Yet mark me he did, for which I will continue to offer thanks every day of my life.

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[56] See again 'Monastic Life: The House of God and the Gate of Heaven', *The Authentic Seal*, pp. 93–130, together with 'A Choir Equal to the Angels', ibid., pp. 133–56, and 'H Monastike Zoe' in *Zoe en Pneumati*, pp. 103–38.

[57] Thus see, for example, the talks 'Ekklisia, Soma Christou' and 'Leitourgika Vimata', in *Theia Latreia: Prosdokia kai Horasis Theou*, pp. 1–16 and 142–57, resp.

[58] See above, p. 212.

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Index

Aaron 206
Academy, Athonian 77–8
Aimilianos, Abbot of Simonopetra 13, 14, 40, 173, 185–91, 194–8, 201–41
Akakios the Younger, St 71
Albania 197
Amand de Mendieta, Emmanuel 74, 75
Anastasia, St 23
Anne, St 22, 23
Antony the Great, St 100, 190, 218–20
Aphrahat the Persian 223–6
Apophthegmata Patrum see *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*
Arabs 25
Aristotle 76
Arkadios, Emperor 41
Athanasios the Athonite, St 69, 190, 197
  spring of 191–2
Athanasios of Grigoriou, Elder 188
Athanasios of Iviron, hieromonk 31
Athanasios of Meteora, St 189–190
Athanasios of Paros, St 87
Athanasius 112, 218–19
Augustine, St 56–7

Balfour, David 158
baptism 91, 110
Barlaam of Calabria 52, 53, 57, 59, 60
Barrington-Ward, Bishop Simon 159
Barsanouphios of Gaza, St 73, 89, 92, 97, 112
Basil of Poiana Mărului, Elder 104–5
Basil the Great, St 63, 95, 112, 116
Berdyaev, N. 146, 155, 156
Bernard of Clairvaux 58
Brown, Peter 210
Bulgakov, Fr Sergei 143, 151, 153
Bulgarians 25

calendar, Julian (Old) 27
Cavarnos, Constantine 88, 174
Cherubim of Oropus, Elder 174
Chilandar, monastery of 25, 31
Citterio, E. 88
Clement 217
Cloud of Unknowing 61–2

Daniel of Katounakia, Elder 42, 188
Daphne 38, 192
Daponte, Kaisarios 97–8, 119
desert of Athos 74, 93
Diadochos 100, 105, 112, 116
Dionysios, Bishop of Trikkala 189, 201
Dionysiou, monastery of 30, 83, 84, 174
Dionysius the Areopagite, St 60–4, 97, 204, 227, 231, 237–8, 240
Dochiariou, monastery of 31
Dorotheos 112
Dositheos, Patriarch of Jerusalem 76

Ecumenical Patriarch 25
Eden 209, 219, 228
Einstein, Albert 128, 158
Elisaios, Abbot of Simonopetra 202
Ephraim of Katounakia, Elder 42, 175, 188, 233, 239
Ephraim, Abbot of Philotheou 42, 174, 175
Ephrem the Syrian, St 11, 112, 193, 227
Esphigmenou, monastery of 36, 49
Eusebius of Caesarea 95
Evagrios of Pontos 54, 58, 94, 101, 111–14, 118, 221–2, 225, 226
Evdokimoff, P. 146

Evthymios, hieromonk, biographer of St Nikodimos 85–7, 97
Evthymios the Younger, St 69–70

Fermor, Patrick Leigh 77
filioque 52, 53, 60
Florence, Council of 53
Florensky, Fr Pavel 64–5, 143, 151
Florovsky, Fr Georges 94
France 197–8, 202
Friends of Mount Athos 11, 15–16

Gabriel, Abbot of Dionysiou 42, 83
Gabriel, Metropolitan of St Petersburg 108
Georgios, Abbot of Grigoriou 40
Gerasimos of Little St Anne, Fr 85
Gregory V, Ecumenical Patriarch 82
Gregory of Nazianzus, St 56, 95, 112
Gregory of Nyssa, St 11, 56, 112
Gregory of Sinai, St 40, 50, 51, 70, 80, 85, 101, 103, 105, 112, 113, 119, 173, 187
Gregory Palamas, St 21, 31, 40, 49–65, 70, 80, 85, 89–90, 92, 96, 97, 101, 117, 163, 173, 185, 187, 190
Grigoriou, monastery of 23

Hadzinikolaou, Bishop Nikolaos 202
Haralambos, Abbot of Dionysiou 174, 176
hesychasm 13, 40, 104, 173, 187
hesychia 13, 55, 65, 93, 113–14, 119
Hesychios the Priest (Batos) 54, 58, 100, 105, 112, 113, 116, 118, 173

Ignatius of Antioch, St 214
Ioakeim of St Anne's skete, Elder 33, 188
Irenaeus 112, 217
Isaac the Syrian, St 96, 101, 135, 173
Isaak of Dionysiou, Elder 188
Islam 75
Iviron, monastery of 30

Jacob's ladder 205–6
Jacob of Serug 227, 231–2
Jesus Prayer 13, 57, 70, 89, 92, 107, 110, 113–17, 119, 126, 165, 168, 171–3, 239
John Cassian 101, 105, 111
John Chrysostom, St 96
John Klimakos, St 96, 135, 183, 205
John of Damascus, St 56, 58–9, 61
John of Kronstadt, St 82, 125
John the Baptist, St 149
John the Carpathian, St 173
John the Russian, St 192
John the Theologian, St 163, 199, 208–9
Joseph of Vatopedi, Elder 165, 174
Joseph the Hesychast, Elder 31, 40, 42, 74, 163–79, 188, 233–4
Judaism 231

Kadloubovsky, Evgeniya 109
Kafsokalyvia, skete of 71
Kallinikos the Hesychast, Elder 42, 188
Kallistos I, Patriarch 70, 103
Karakalou, monastery of 174
Karoulia 38, 103
Karyes 16, 20, 38, 92
Kataphygiotis, Kallistos 101
Katounakia 38, 103, 175
kenosis 148, 150–2, 156, 158
Khomyakov, A. 157
Kiev 104, 176
Kodratos of Karakalou, Elder 188
Kollyvades movement 40, 71, 78–84, 93, 110, 119
Konstamonitou, monastery of 174
Korais, Adamantios 77, 94
Kosmas the Aetolian, St 40, 75, 93
Koukouzeles, St John 65
Kyrievsky, Ivan 143

Lakkou, skete of 25
Landos, Agapios 71
Lavra, Great, monastery of 37, 49, 69, 83

Little St Anne, skete of 166, 174
Lossky, Vladimir 59, 111
Louth, Andrew 142
Loyola, Ignatius 91, 92

Makarios Notaras, St 71, 78, 84–7, 89, 94–102, 105–6, 109, 111, 113–14, 119
Makraios, Sergios 78
Mantzaridis, George 173
Mariamne 216–18
Marion, Jean-Luc 60–1
Maritain, Jacques 62
Mark the Ascetic 101, 113, 173
Martyrs, New 81, 89
Marxism 155
Mary Magdalene, St 23
Mary the Mother of God 22, 29–32, 125, 164, 166, 176, 191–2, 211–12
  Girdle of 31; icons of 30–1
Matthopoulos, Fr Evsevios 82
Maximos the Confessor, St 56, 96, 101, 105, 116, 117, 153, 173
Maximos of Kafsokalyvia, St 70, 85
Merezhkovsky, D.S. 155
Meteora 189–90, 198, 201
Methodius of Olympus 217
Meyendorff, Fr John 52, 63
Moses 206–7, 210, 212–13, 215, 240

Nathaniel 208
Neamţ 102, 188
Neilos 101, 105
Neilos Cabasilas 52–3
Neohellenism 76
nepsis 13, 53–4, 113, 119
Nikephoros Gregoras 50
Nikephoros the Hesychast, St 40, 51, 85, 101, 107, 173
Nikitas Stithatos 100
Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain, St 21, 31, 40, 71–119, 187
Nikon of Karoulia, Fr 12, 91, 109, 118, 188
Nikon of New Skete, Fr 120
Nil Sorsky, St 40

Origen 95, 217
Ormylia 198, 202, 210, 228

Pachomios, St 70
Paisios, Fr 23, 40, 42, 165, 174, 188, 239
Paisy Velichkovsky, St 21, 40, 71, 85, 87, 94, 98–105, 108, 187–8
Palladios 70
Palmer, Gerald 91, 109
Panselinos 21
Paul, St 80, 127, 150, 211, 213
Paul of Evergetis, 86, 95
Paul the Simple, St 190
Pericles 76
Peter, St 150
Peter of Damascus 100, 105, 112, 116, 173
Peter the Athonite, St 69
Philaretos of Konstamonitou, Elder 188
Philokalia 21, 40, 54, 57, 72–119, 173
Philotheos Kokkinos 40, 50, 51, 70, 100, 105
Philotheou, monastery of 174
pilgrims 28, 131, 198, 235
Placide, Père 181–2
Planudes, Manuel 56
Plato 76, 218
Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna 214–15
Popovich, Fr Justin 176
Priscillian 215
Prophet Elijah, skete of 187

Roman Catholic Church 81, 91, 111
Romanians 25
Rozanov, V. 146, 155
Runciman, Steven 16
Russians 25

St Anne, skete of 79, 174
St Antony, monastery of (Arizona) 175
St Basil, skete of 38, 103, 104
St John the Forerunner, skete of 25
St Panteleimon, monastery of 25, 74, 126, 141
St Paul, monastery of 30, 36, 37
Sava of Serbia, St 40
Savvas the Confessor 188
Sayings of the Desert Fathers 70, 112, 220
Scholem, Gershom 231
Scupoli, Lorenzo 90, 92
Segneri, Paulo 91
Seraphim of Sarov, St 182
Serbs 25, 49
Severus, Gabriel 76
Silouan the Athonite, St 14, 40, 74, 123–40, 141–59, 188
Simon of Simonopetra, St 184–7, 199
Simonopetra, monastery of 23, 181–99, 202, 231, 235, 239
Sinai, Mount 206–7, 212–13, 217, 221, 228, 240
Sinkewicz, Fr Robert 50, 52, 54, 57
Smyrna 83, 86, 98
Solomon 207–8
Soloviev, V. 146, 151
Solzhenitsyn, Alexander 77
Sophronios II, Ecumenical Patriarch 82
Sophrony, Archimandrite 40, 42, 74, 124, 126, 128, 129–34, 137–8, 141–59, 165, 174
Speake, Graham 44, 74
Stephen, St 208, 214
Stewart, Fr Columba 221–2
Swinburne, Richard 144
Symeon Metaphrastis 101, 112
Symeon of Serbia, St 40
Symeon the New Theologian, St 89, 92, 97, 100, 105, 107, 119, 173, 227
Symeon Stylites, St 210
Syrigos, Meletios 76

Tachiaos, Anthony-Emil 99
Tertullian 215
Thalassios 100
Thekla 216, 217
Theodore of Edessa, St 100, 106
Theodore the Stoudite 101
Theodosios, St 197
Theoklitos of Dionysiou, monk 31, 40
Theoktistos the Stoudite 57
Theoleptos of Philadelphia 40, 50–1, 53–8, 61–2, 173
Theophanes the Cretan 21
theosis 36, 116–17, 119, 226
Theotokos *see* Mary the Mother of God
Thomas Aquinas 52, 62
Tillich, Paul 152
Turks 49, 75, 81

Vasileios, Abbot of Iviron 40
Vatopedi, monastery of 31, 49, 78, 98, 99, 174, 198
Velestinlis, Rhigas 89–90
Venice 86, 98, 109
Voltaire 76
Voulgaris, Evgenios 77–8

Ware, Bishop Kallistos 15–16, 146, 202
women, exclusion of 21–4, 123

Xanthopoulos, Kallistos and Ignatios 40, 101, 110, 112, 118, 173
Xenophontos, monastery of 31
Xeropotamou, monastery of 98, 174

Zagoraios, Dionysios 89, 97
Zizioulas, Metropolitan John 212
Zoe movement 82
Zographou, monastery of 25

Most of the papers included in this volume were first presented at a conference convened by the Friends of Mount Athos at Madingley Hall, Cambridge, in 2003. Mount Athos is the principal surviving centre of Orthodox monasticism and the spiritual heart of the Orthodox world. The aims of the conference were to draw attention to the historic importance, the spirituality, and the religious legacy of the Holy Mountain and to shed light on the contribution made by Athonite monasticism not only to worldwide Orthodoxy but also to Christianity at large. Many of the papers focus on particular individuals who from the fourteenth century to the twentieth have exemplified the spiritual traditions of Athos and whose memory as spiritual fathers, confessors, and ascetics continues to inspire their successors today.

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